

A Comparative View of Teaching Practice in Physical Education

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Abstract

A major component of teacher education and the preparation of teachers throughout the world is 'practice teaching'. This article offers a comparative examination of practice teaching experiences, focusing upon three different programmes, in three different countries. Results of research investigating the experiences of Postgraduate Diploma and Diploma trainees at the School of Physical Education, within the National Institute of Education, Singapore, are compared to Postgraduate Certificate of Education trainees in the United Kingdom and undergraduate trainees in the United States. Specifically, the research examined trainees feelings of preparedness, the support systems of most benefit to them, their frustrations, and the relationship between their expectations and the reality of their practice teaching.

Introduction

A major component of the pre-service preparation of teachers throughout the world is that of 'student' or 'practice' teaching, also referred to as 'teaching practice'. Guyton and McIntyre (1990, p. 514) referred to practice teaching as 'the most universally approved education course'. Teachers themselves, have repeatedly identified practice teaching as the single most beneficial component of their teacher education programme (Lortie, 1975). The importance of student teaching was further supported by the Carnegie Task Force (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986) as the most effective stop on a student's journey from status student to status teacher. More recently, McIntyre, Byrd, and Fox (1996) reviewed 'field and laboratory experiences' and concluded that practice teaching still maintains an overwhelming feeling of importance to those involved. The existence of practice teaching appears universal, yet the structure, timing and implementation of this experience is not.

The purpose of this article is to look at the structure, timing and students' perceptions of practice teaching in Singapore and to compare these findings to those of different programmes based in the United States and the United Kingdom. The specific programmes chosen for comparison in these three settings were of particular interest because of the differences in the duration (two, four and one years respectively) of programmes that all lead to teaching certification. An examination of practice teaching experiences within each programme was regarded as the most appropriate focus in the light of the research interest in preparation for teaching. For example, would students in a one-year programme feel as prepared to practice teach as those in a two or four-year programme? If the students felt prepared, why? If they did not feel ready, why not? If the results varied amongst the three programmes, what does that tell us?

Likewise, it was anticipated that support and sources of frustration for practicing teachers may vary depending on the structure of the experience. Student teachers in Singapore are often sent to schools in pairs, while that is not the case in

the US. Was the 'buddy' system seen as positive or negative? What implications may be drawn from the practice for Singapore and other settings? The UK has committed itself to a partnership model that places more responsibility on cooperating or mentor teachers, than is presently the case in the US or Singapore. What are the implications of this for the practicing teacher?

Finally, did the students' expectations of teaching meet with the reality of the school experience? If yes, what experiences helped to foster their realistic expectations? If no, why was the experience such a shock to them, and is there anything to be learned from students' perceptions that could lead to improvements of the overall experience for them?

Practice Teaching in Singapore

Within Nanyang Technological University lies the National Institute of Education (NIE), which includes the School of Physical Education (SPE). NIE is the sole teacher training institution in the country. The university operates on two, sixteen week semesters per year. All pre-service students (trainees) involved in this study were enrolled in either the Diploma in Education (PE), or the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE-PE) programme within SPE. All the participants entered the local schools for a five-week practice teaching exercise at the beginning of the second semester of their first year. They observed their cooperating teachers for the first week and then assumed full teaching responsibilities for the remainder of the attachment. Trainees were also required to teach a second subject besides physical education. These same students also entered practice teaching in their second and final year in the seventh week of the first semester. This attachment was for a duration of seven weeks. The student teacher assumed full teaching responsibilities throughout their assigned time in physical education and their second subject.

For both teaching attachments, student teachers were assigned to a university faculty supervisor (FS) and a cooperating teacher (CT) in the school. The assignments and the schools that students are attached to are changed annually. The FSs were required to observe and assess their student teacher a minimum of three times. The CTs were also required to compile three official assessment reports, plus a summative evaluation. The formal evaluation was facilitated by an evaluation form provided by SPE. The evaluation form focused on the topical areas of planning, developing of lessons, communicating, managing, and evaluating. Final grades were based on the results of all the assessment reports, but ultimately the FS determined the final grade. Besides the aforementioned triad that existed for each trainee, a fellow student teacher or so-called teaching 'buddy' was assigned to the same school. While these two trainees did not team-teach together, they were encouraged to support each other whenever possible.

Practice Teaching in the United States

A comparative look at the timing, structure and implementation of practice teaching in the United States (US) indicates that it is very different to Singapore. While it is difficult to generalise educational practices in the US, as each state is responsible for mandating policy decisions, a very clear trend regarding practice teaching experiences has emerged. Practice teaching or student teaching as it is called in the US is

a part of all physical education teacher education programmes and is completed as one of the final requirements, typically in the last semester of the fourth year. 'It is an off-campus, eight to 16 week full-time teaching assignment, depending on whether the prospective teacher is requesting certification for elementary and/or secondary teaching' (O'Sullivan, 1990, p. 17). The teaching practice triad mentioned in the Singapore context occurs in the U.S. as well, with a student teacher, a FS and a CT in the field. Assessment is usually done in the manner of the Singapore model also.

Teacher education programmes typically wait until the end of a student's fourth year of studies, before their practice teaching in school. A national survey of physical education teacher education programmes, however, revealed that 86 per cent required field experiences before practice teaching (Placek & Silverman, 1983). Field experiences usually involve student teachers working with small groups of children with university supervision on campus or out in the schools. These experiences are seen as effective ways of bridging the theory of methods classes with the practice of teaching pupils in a controlled setting before the students go out for practice teaching full time (Wright, 1992).

Practice Teaching in the United Kingdom

While the term, the United Kingdom (UK) will be used through this paper, developments in England and Wales are the specific focus of attention. Government initiatives have played a major role in revamping teacher education in the UK, to the extent that higher education institutions (HEI) have a diminished role in training prospective teachers and the schools are taking on much greater responsibilities. According to Mawer (1996) the training of teachers has become predominantly school-based with two-thirds of trainees' time being spent in schools. While it is acknowledged that there is more than one programme that students can attend to obtain teaching certification in the UK, this comparative investigation specifically addressed the one year Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE).

Although the implementation of PGCE programmes may vary from one institution to the other (see Tait, 1996; Mawer, 1996; Hardy, 1994), the programme duration is consistent. For the purposes of this work, a programme described by Hardy (1999) was investigated. The programme was 36 weeks in total, with the trainees being in schools for 24 weeks. Recruits for this PGCE had a degree in physical education or the sport sciences from a HEI in England or Wales. Trainees were phased into their teaching experiences by mainly observing experienced teachers, at first, and eventually taking on full teaching responsibilities as the year progressed. Time spent at the university was interspersed throughout the year, whereby trainees attended lectures and seminars related to planning, teaching, and evaluation. The FSs observed their student teacher four times over the course of the year. The CTs (mentors) in the schools worked closely with the trainees and were responsible for providing the final grade, taking into account the FS input as well.

Having outlined these structural characteristics and differences of the three programmes, we now move to focus attention upon the student teachers' perceptions regarding issues of preparedness, support and frustration sources, and 'expectation versus reality', pertaining to practice teaching. As the structure, timing and implementation of practice teaching in the three settings was different, it was reasonable to assume that respective student perspectives may vary. If there were

differences, what might it mean to the stakeholders involved in the process? What can be learned that may be of use to people who are responsible for coordinating practice teaching experiences, PETE professionals, student teachers, and mentors in the schools? Furthermore, were there commonalities in the student teachers' perspectives, and if so, what do the similarities tell us about the experiences and preparations?

Method

When trying to understand students' perceptions of practice teaching it is best to go directly to the participants with questions regarding their experiences. When trying to comprehend participants thoughts, feelings and perceptions about a particular event or experiences, qualitative techniques are often used to help provide a detailed description of what actually occurred (Darst, Zakrusek & Mancini, 1989).

Subjects

The study population consisted of 102 students who were enrolled in either the School of Physical Education's Diploma in Education (PE) or the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PE) programme. Of these participants, fifty matriculated in 1993, while the remaining 52 belonged to the 1994 intake. All of the participants completed their year one, five week teaching practice attachment at the end of the first week of February. It is important to note that data collected for this study came solely from the Singapore setting. Findings from studies conducted by other researchers in the US and UK are drawn upon in discussion to develop a comparative analysis.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was an open-ended questionnaire. When questionnaires are used the open form is more appropriate than the closed form if the objective is to obtain information of a qualitative nature (Borg & Gall, 1989). The instrument consisted of an information section whereby the students were asked to give their gender and programme they were enrolled in. The questionnaire was anonymous. The students were then asked to take as much time as they needed to answer six questions. These questions pertained to their perceptions of their preparedness to practice teach, the support systems they encountered, their frustrations, and the relationship between their expectations of practice teaching and the reality of the experience. The questionnaires were administered within the second week after completion of the practice teaching attachment.

A pretest of the questionnaire was done using students from the July 1992 intake. This technique is necessary to ensure that the questions used are not ambiguous, misleading or difficult to answer in any way (Borg & Gall, 1989). Students who participated in the pretest were also interviewed informally to ascertain if they had any difficulties in completing the questionnaire. Based on the pretest, one question was rewritten to help the researcher gain a more complete understanding of student responses by being more specific in the way the question was asked.

Data Analysis

In the present study, data were analysed through an inductive process. Answers were divided into major categories that were further divided into subcategories where appropriate. Ascertaining the main category of a question was not difficult as the questionnaire was straightforward. Subcategories were established to allow for a thorough description of the data. This was done by analysing the data under a category to determine the dominant sub themes.

Category Reliability

Subdividing categories was a subjective exercise where some interpretation of the data was required. Therefore, the researcher asked a colleague not involved in the study to assist in analysing the data of twenty randomly selected questionnaires. Firstly, he was asked to determine the major categories of each answer. There was 100 per cent inter-observer reliability between the author and the volunteer analyst as to what the categories should be. Next the volunteer was given the information on how the categories were subdivided by the author. The volunteer was then asked to determine what data went in what sub category. For this exercise, inter observer reliability was 96 per cent. The results of the reliability procedures led the researcher to conclude that the categorisation and subsequent subcategorising could be used to reliably analyse the data collected.

Results

Student Preparedness

Students were asked whether they felt their School of Physical Education (SPE) modules and experiences prepared them for their practice teaching or not. They were then asked what was most beneficial and/or what was missing in their preparation. With all of the students answering the question (102 responses), 46 said that they felt prepared and 56 stated they did not feel prepared going into their teaching attachment. The most popular reason given for not feeling prepared (37 responses) was that the students still had not taken many of the curriculum/activity modules that were part of the overall two year programme. As one participant put it: 'We were expected to teach certain skills such as swimming which we were not taught how to teach yet' (#64-3). A further thirteen students mentioned that they felt ill prepared in terms of their ability to manage a class. Ten of these responses mentioned specifically their concern for managing a large class. A typical answer was: '. . . our micro-teaching dealt with only a portion of the actual number of students that we handled in our practice' (#50-3).

Students who answered the question pertaining to what was most beneficial overwhelmingly (39 responses) mentioned teaching methods. Of these answers the module Teaching Method I was mentioned or a specific example of a method or strategy was expanded upon: such as: 'the strategies to promote maximum participation and the teaching of modified games' (#62-3).

Support Structures

Participants were asked to comment on where they felt most of their support came from during their practice teaching experience. The respondents typically mentioned

more than one source of support, but the one mentioned most often (52 times) was the school-based co-operating teacher (CT). 'Most of the support I received came from my cooperating teacher. He offered me ideas and flexibility to try out my own teaching styles' (#92-1). The next most prevalent category, with 46 responses, was the teaching 'buddy' who was assigned to the same school. 'We shared a lot of teaching experiences, like coming back after a bad class. There's someone to listen to your problems. I think you need that the most; someone who understands what you are going through' (#20-4). This was followed by Faculty supervisors (FSs) from SPE with 37 responses. 'My supervisor was most encouraging and provided valuable feedback to me' (#21-4). Twenty-eight participants also mentioned that other teachers in the school provided them with support.

Sources of Frustration

Respondents were asked to comment on any sources of frustration, if any, they encountered during their teaching attachment. By far, the largest source came from the students that they were teaching, according to 46 participants. What frustrated the participants was when students were misbehaving. '... some classes were just disobedient and sometimes time was wasted disciplining and trying to organise them' (#6-1). Other times they were frustrated with the lack of cooperation from students. 'Students were not willing to try no matter how much I tried to motivate and interest them' (#28-4). Fourteen students mentioned that they were frustrated over the school's lack of facility space and/or equipment to teach the way that they wanted.

Expectation Versus Reality

The participants were asked if their expectations of practice teaching matched with the reality of the experience. Thirty-nine people answered that yes, things went as they thought they would: 'Yes, I was given lots of opportunities to practice what I learned and wanted to try in PE' (#100-6). Thirty-nine respondents also answered that things did not go as expected. The biggest reason for unfulfilled expectations was that students felt, on hindsight, that they were too idealistic about the students they would be teaching: 'No. I overestimated student enthusiasm. It was quite difficult to motivate students to give their all and try there best' (#111-6).

Discussion

The results in the Singapore context, and comparison to other findings need to be addressed in the distinct contexts of the different programmes examined. As outlined above, the timing and structure of practice teaching in the US and the UK is very different to that in Singapore. In the US, pre-university school finishers who plan to enter the teaching profession must spend at least four years in a teacher education programme and complete a BA or a BSc in Education (Physical Education). In Singapore, students are given the opportunity to teach after only two years of a teacher education programme; graduating with a Diploma in Education. Some students do have the opportunity to study for four years and receive a BA or a BSc in Physical Education but they also receive the Diploma in Physical Education. Therefore, even the four-year students do practice teaching attachments in their first

two years, as do the Diploma students. For the PGCE programme in the UK, physical education or sport science graduates (ie degree holding students) can obtain a certificate to teach by completing one additional year, which is school-based, two-thirds of the time.

As the previous descriptions of the three separate programmes indicated, differences were identified in the timing and structure of practice teaching across programmes. The amount of time that students had in PETE programmes before their practice teaching varied from three and half years (US), to sixteen weeks (Singapore) to zero days (UK). As a result the course content that students were 'exposed to' before their practice teaching showed tremendous variation. UK students were sent out to schools immediately in their programme. They returned to the university intermittently for twelve of the 36 total weeks, where they received lectures and seminars relating to planning, teaching, and evaluation. As stated, these students had already obtained a degree in physical education or the sport sciences. Students from Singapore attended PETE modules for one semester, comprising an introduction to physical education theory class, one instructional strategies class, and six practical activity classes such as basketball and gymnastics. For the most part, these students had no earlier exposure to physical education at the tertiary level. Students in the US were exposed to a wide variety of curricular content (with less or greater emphasis on theory over the practical) for three and half years before their practice teaching. Like in Singapore, these students had not been exposed to physical education at the tertiary level before enrolling in their PETE programme.

The time spent in the practice teaching environment also varied, from eight to sixteen weeks (US), five weeks in Singapore and 24 intermittent weeks in the UK. Student teachers in the US and Singapore had cooperating teachers, and university supervisors assigned to them, with the supervisor assuming the greater responsibility to assess the student. In the UK, the cooperating teacher played a more dominant role than the supervisor in assessing the practicing teacher. Singapore students were placed with teaching partners, which occasionally occurred in the UK, but was not the practice in the US.

Feelings of Preparedness

The results of the questionnaire for physical education students in Singapore regarding their feelings of preparedness to practice teach may not be surprising when considering they only had one semester (sixteen weeks) of classes before they were sent out to teach. Of the 56 students who felt that they were not prepared to teach, 37 mentioned specifically that they did not feel they had taken enough curriculum/activity modules.

Results of several studies involving PGCE trainees in the UK have produced similar findings. Hardy (1994; 1995; 1996) and Mawer (1996) reported that student teachers complained that their knowledge of 'activity areas' (such as 'games activities'; 'gymnastic activities'; 'athletic activities') was limited. Following interviews with 23 student teachers upon completion of their practicum, Hardy (1995, p. 22) reported that, 'Every single student noted a general concern about lack of knowledge in some of the activity areas of the physical education curriculum'. He went on to explain that perhaps this is not surprising as undergraduate programmes in the UK have evolved from activity-based to more theoretically-based ones.

Results of studies from undergraduate US programmes suggested that students were, for the most part, satisfied with their content knowledge going into their final teaching practice (Askins & Imwold, 1994; Graber, 1995; Rikard & Knight, 1997). Graber (1995, p. 174) found that student teachers believed that activity courses 'were critical to developing subject matter knowledge'. Furthermore, these students believed that physical education methodology courses provided the most useful knowledge within the overall programme. This finding mirrored Singapore students' views relating to the most useful that they had taken during their programme of studies. However, a word of caution must be stated regarding the generalisation of this US data. As undergraduate programmes are so diverse and there is a great debate over curricular content of physical education teacher education (Bain, 1990), results may vary greatly depending on how much emphasis is placed on activity-based courses versus a more theoretically-based programme.

The area that seemed to determine whether student teachers in the US felt prepared to teach was not their exposure to relevant courses of study but rather to opportunities to teach in progressive, clinical settings before their final student teaching experience. Phrases used to describe these teaching models varied from 'pre-practicum' to 'school-based field experiences' to 'early field experiences' to a 'practicum'. All of these models provide students with the opportunity to observe and/or teach, usually a small group of children, under the supervision of university faculty in a controlled setting. This approach suggests that if students are given several opportunities to teach in a way that is progressive (small numbers, limited time, controlled facility and equipment usage and close supervision) then they will be better prepared to student teach at the end of their fourth (final) year. Previous studies have suggested that the more clinical settings students are exposed to, the more prepared they feel they are (O'Sullivan & Tsangaridou, 1992; Graber, 1995; Rikard & Knight, 1997).

Sources of Support

Singapore participants (52 out of 102) revealed that the source of greatest support to them during their teaching practice was their CT. US data, specifically from Bain (1990) and Guyton & McIntyre (1990) have also determined that the practicing teacher/cooperating teacher dyad is very important and meaningful. CTs are in a position to interact with the practicing teachers on a daily basis. Rikard and Knight (1997, p. 446) pointed out that the 'dyad' between a trainee and a CT is crucial to the trainee's development. When it is 'good' the CT is able 'to relinquish classroom control to the student teacher, trust them to handle the class, provide back-up support in the face of problems, model effective teaching and offer feedback'. They also pointed out that sometimes the dyad does not work well, particularly if the CT is not willing to relinquish classroom control. Askins and Imwold (1994) also found that the relationship can be a difficult one. Practicing teachers and CTs were found to have differing perceptions about the goals and objectives of physical education and the roles of each in the day-to-day teaching of the students. Brunell, Tousignant and Pieron (1981, p. 85) found that the practicing teachers in their study were 'unhappy with the model of teaching presented by the cooperating teachers'.

In the UK setting, Hardy (1999) found that PGCE students expressed some dissatisfaction with cooperating (mentor) teachers in the field. Mentors were men-

tioned most often when subjects responded to negative aspects of their practice teaching. Students also perceived mentors as a disadvantage in their development as teachers. Furthermore, a majority of respondents (58%) reported that a mentor's assessment of them had a mediating effect on their teaching, although the rest claimed there was no effect. Participants who were unhappy with their mentors focused on issues of inadequate preparation and the implementation process. There were, however, also positive perceptions of mentors. Student teachers appreciated their role in helping them plan, prepare and deliver lessons. Mentors also provided some teachers with emotional support.

The Singaporean study reported here was noteworthy in that only one participant mentioned frustration with their cooperating teacher. One of the limitations of this study was the use of questionnaires and the absence, therefore, of opportunities to probe participants' perceptions of this all-important relationship. A follow-up, open-ended interview session with randomly selected participants is warranted.

The source that provided the second greatest amount of support (46 responses) in the Singapore context was from the peer or buddy teacher assigned to the same school. The prevalent feeling among those who found support here was that they could really empathise with each other and they often provided not only encouragement but advice on methods and strategies of teaching. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of information in the literature pertaining to this potentially potent relationship. An in-depth look at the dynamics of this pairing could prove valuable and provide clues to help teacher educators facilitate as fruitful a union as possible. There was no mention of a teaching buddy in the review of US data related to teaching practice. The UK data mentioned that at least one of the schools used in the PGCE programme assigned students to teach in pairs, and furthermore, had them team teaching. Two students commented that although they 'got along' with their teaching partner, they did not enjoy team teaching with them as their methods were different (Hardy, 1996). Mawer (1996) stated that 25 per cent of PGCE students mentioned that they received help with the planning and teaching of PE lessons from 'fellow students'. It is unclear whether these students were formal teaching partners, or just friends taking the same course of study.

Sources of Frustration

The source of greatest frustration to practicing teachers in Singapore was overwhelmingly the students (pupils) who they were teaching. Students who were misbehaving and uncooperative made it difficult at times for the practicing teachers to accomplish what they had hoped to in a given lesson. U.S. data also suggests that trainees had serious problems with their students. Askins and Imwold, (1994, p. 43) found the practicing teacher frustrated by students who were 'either participating in an inappropriate behaviour (behaviour that disrupted the teacher during the teaching of the class) or off-task behaviour'. Rikard and Knight (1997) cited numerous examples of trainees facing problems with students. These ranged from students not caring and not wanting to participate, to students being disrespectful to them. Graber (1995, p. 164) found that disciplining students was a primary concern of the trainees in her study. In fact, for a minority, 'discipline was described as the most immediate problem throughout the student teaching experience'. She also

found that trainees struggled so much to motivate secondary level students that they felt out of their depth, working with this age group.

Hardy (1996) found that PGCE trainees from the UK struggled with their students. Again, a lack of interest and/or disruptive behaviour from the students caused frustration and dismay. Hardy (1995, p. 23) stated that all 23 trainees in his study 'made some reference to discipline during their interviews, and most of them reported that they had to approach a teacher for help sometime during their teaching experiences'.

Expectation and Reality

This source of frustration also led to a significant number of participants having a practice teaching experience that was very different to what they had expected. Singapore trainees were split when asked if their teaching practice matched their expectations, with fifty per cent agreeing and the other half disagreeing. Those who felt that it did not meet their expectation repeatedly mentioned that the students in the schools were much more difficult to deal with than they had imagined. Rikard and Knight (1997) also reported that their student teachers in the U.S. suffered reality shock at the behaviour of their students. Graber (1995) also reported participants who dealt with the same type of shock, but only if they had not been exposed to earlier public school practicums. Those trainees who had experienced earlier practicums knew what to expect and therefore adjusted to the reality of the school setting more easily.

Hardy (1999) found that forty per cent of his participants in the UK felt that their teaching experiences matched with their expectations, and the other sixty per cent did not. Many 'found teaching more tiring and physical, and planning more complicated and time-consuming, than expected' (Hardy, 1999, p. 187). Copeland (1979, p. 194) recognised twenty years ago that teacher education programmes must 'develop a clearer and more integrated understanding of the realities present in the classrooms' where practicing teachers are being placed. Perhaps we still have more to learn in this area.

Conclusion

While the PETE programmes examined in this study matriculated students for either one, two or four years, and therefore, varied greatly in their curricular content, they all required practice teaching. This experience will continue to be a very significant step for prospective teachers on their journey toward induction into the profession. Based on this comparative look at three separate programmes, in three different regions of the world, several points are highlighted for the attention of training institutions and researchers.

Trainees across all three programmes reinforced the importance of acquiring knowledge in the activity areas of the physical education curriculum. In programmes that send students into schools within the first year to do their practice teaching, pedagogical content knowledge should be addressed prior to placement. Hardy (1995, p.24) argued also that 'school subject mentors may have to be given more time during the school day to focus on such knowledge'. He also suggested that in-service courses in a teacher's first year of teaching may have to play a more prominent role than it presently does.

For students involved in three or four year teacher education programmes whereby practice teaching occurs in the final semester, several opportunities for closely supervised field experiences, under controlled conditions, (on campus or at schools) should be provided. These pre-practicums 'can provide opportunities for preservice teachers to explore their understandings of teaching, schooling, and the role of the professional teacher in the education of children and youth' (O'Sullivan & Tsangaridou, 1992, p. 390).

This article supports other researchers' findings regarding the teaching practice 'triad'. Cooperating teachers and faculty supervisors have been shown to be helpful and supportive of trainees. There is, however, also the potential for problems. Communication needs to be prevalent and on going amongst participants to ensure that perceptions, expectations and roles are clearly defined and the triad remains supportive (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Specifically within the UK context where CTs have been given greater responsibilities for guidance and assessment of practicing teachers, Hardy (1999) has cautioned against placing too much importance on the CT's role. He suggested that other personnel in the school and university faculty still have an important role to play in the development of student teachers. Tjeerdsma (1998, p. 226) reported that CTs in US schools described a positive perspective on their role when they 'received considerable help from the university'. Furthermore they 'appreciated the clear guidelines established by the university, and valued interactions with the university supervisor'. Regardless of whether CTs are given more responsibility within the practice teaching triad, it appears that the relationships work best when there is clear and open communication between the university and school personnel involved. As the student teacher is 'caught in the middle', between expectations from both parties, it makes sense to have all members of the triad on 'the same page'.

The potential utilisation of a different practice teaching relationship, that of the teaching partner 'dyad' is of particular interest to the author. Teaching buddies have been shown to be positive for several reasons. They provide someone to share teaching ideas with and/or give and receive feedback from. Buddies can also empathise with each other as they are 'walking in the same shoes'. They have demonstrated both personal and professional support which in its own unique way can not be provided by a CT or a FS. As one trainee stated, 'I can share things with my buddy that I wouldn't dare say to anyone else' (Wright, 1998, p. 15). As their relationship with their partner does not include an assessment role, it appears to 'free them up' to be themselves, to even reveal their weaknesses and fears without feeling that they will be penalised for it. Clearly, more could and should be investigated regarding the potential of this dyad to support practicing teachers.

Trainees across all programmes in this study had concerns and problems dealing with students. Discipline and motivation, in particular, were mentioned repeatedly. These results are not atypical (see for example, Kagan, 1992; Pelletier & Martel, 1994). Siedentop (1991) has argued that discipline can potentially be diminished through the use of explicit routines and rules, and effective management and organisational skills. Pelletier and Martel (1994) suggested that behaviour management should be a focal point of teacher training. Again, pre-practicum experiences may offer trainees more opportunities, not only to implement teaching methods and strategies to deal with these issues, but also to enable the trainees to

more realistically assess student behaviour patterns. If students are placed in practice teaching so early in their programme that pre-practicums are not possible, then these management issues should be addressed through role playing and case studies (Wright, 1996). These strategies will enable students to assume the role of a teacher, and anticipate potential problems they may face during their practice teaching.

Besides further investigation into the teaching partner role, further examination of the practice teaching triad is warranted. If the partnership model in place in the UK becomes more prevalent in teacher training throughout the world (as it appears it will), then the training of CTs becomes of paramount interest and concern. It would be worthwhile to examine various training programmes to determine their effectiveness. Studying partnership models that create a close theoretical, philosophical, and practical relationship between the PETE programmes that student teachers come from, and the schools they teach in, would be a positive addition to the practice teaching literature base. The more we understand issues that surround practice teaching experiences, the more meaningful, potentially, is the experience.

Trainees also need to feel that the realities of the classroom they are about to face are ones that they understand and for which they have been adequately prepared. Investigation into the effectiveness of strategies and methods that help students prepare for issues such as behaviour management, that they will face in their practice teaching, may provide clues as to how PETE programmes can best prepare students for this crucial experience. Finally, it is one thing to report on student perceptions related to their PETE experiences, it is another to act on them. PETE personnel need to listen to student voices and implement practical changes that will ultimately improve students' preparation for practice, and eventually, full-time teaching.

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