

# *Inquiry Into Partnered Student Teaching in an Urban School–University Partnership*

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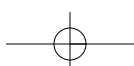
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**ABSTRACT:** School–university partnerships are promising collaborations for better preparing qualified and competent teachers for the realities of today’s diverse American classrooms. Research has been conducted on many aspects of partnerships, but few studies have focused on partnered student teaching placements. In this article, a professor and five of her former teacher education students share the outcomes of an inquiry group that they conducted, which focused on analyzing learning opportunities in an urban school–university partnership. As a result of their collaborative research, they describe how partnered field experiences promote student teachers’ learning by providing (1) comfort in a diverse school environment and in the role of teacher, (2) support for planning and delivering effective instruction, and (3) development as reflective practitioners and critical thinkers. This article is unique in that student teachers share their experiences directly with the teacher education community, as coauthors with their university professor.

School–university partnerships are promising collaborations for better preparing qualified and competent teachers for the realities of today’s diverse American classrooms (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Cristol & Gimberty, 2002; Goodlad, 1993; Groulx, 2001; Kroll, Bowyer, Rutherford, & Hauben, 1997). Research has been conducted on many aspects of partnerships, but few studies have focused on partnered student teaching placements, where two student teachers work in one classroom mentored by the same cooperating teacher (Bullough et al., 2002; Kromrey & Wynn, 1999; Kuhns, Hoover, & Leese, 1997). In a study on the topic of partnered placements, Bullough and colleagues (2002) found that “without exception, the preservice

teachers liked working with a partner” and “noted few drawbacks to having a teaching partner” (p. 73). When Bullough and colleagues compared the experiences of partnered student teachers with single-placement student teachers, they concluded that preservice teachers in partner placements became invested in each other’s development; they also felt better supported during their practicum, more positive about their teaching experience, and more confident about their teaching abilities.

In this article, a university professor examines the topic of partnered student teaching with those directly involved in the collaborative student teaching experience. The professor and five of her former teacher education





students conducted an inquiry group focused on analyzing learning opportunities in an urban school–university partnership. As a result of their collaborative research, the students describe three promising outcomes of partnered field experiences for student teachers' learning: (1) comfort in a diverse school environment and in the role of teacher, (2) support for planning and delivering effective instruction, and (3) development as reflective practitioners and critical thinkers. Partnered student teaching does not come without challenges, however. One student who experienced a less-than-collaborative relationship with her partner outlines some drawbacks to the model. This article is unique in that student teachers share their experiences directly with the teacher education community, as legitimate knowers and researchers, rather than as participants in another's research study. Understanding that they have much to learn about becoming teachers, they suggest that they have much to share about successful partnerships in teacher education—especially, partnered field experiences.

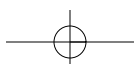
## Context for the Inquiry

For 3 years, the professor organized and taught Urban Immersion, a site-based course and field experience in an urban school–university partnership. The integrated course and field experience were deliberately required at the beginning of the teacher education program to introduce the predominantly White middle-class university students to the urban school context, a context with which most were unfamiliar. In addition to exposing students to a new educational environment, the Urban Immersion experience laid the foundation for developing students' inquiry stances (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999), a viewpoint discussed later in this section.

Urban Immersion arose from a long-standing partnership between Boston College (BC) and Brighton High School (BHS), which was further developed when BC was awarded a federal grant from Title II of the Higher Education Act (Stairs, 2006). Addi-

tional resources made expanding the partnership a reality, enough to improve teacher preparation, professional development, and student achievement. In spring 2002, the school–university partners met at the invitation of school leaders to find ways to involve more BC students in BHS classrooms. Teachers wanted to implement more authentic student-centered pedagogical practices, but with class sizes averaging 30 students, of varying abilities and interests, they needed more support. The idea of placing two to three student teachers in classrooms was one solution that the school–university partners decided to employ beginning that fall. Rather than spend the majority of classroom time observing, as is typical in BC's early field experiences, BC students in Urban Immersion would be expected to get involved teaching individual, small groups, and whole classes of BHS students from day one. They would spend most periods teaching with a main cooperating teacher, but they would also teach at least one period with a second cooperating teacher, thereby allowing for some variety and for more than half the faculty to have additional adults in their classrooms on Thursdays. The partners came to agreement that a university course would be held at the school site and that students' work in classrooms would fulfill a field experience requirement. Responding to the partner school's needs, as well as meeting the university's needs, makes Urban Immersion beneficial for all stakeholders, as Goodlad (1993) envisioned with school–university partnerships.

Before Urban Immersion, BC did not recruit or prepare undergraduate students for the urban setting. With the request from BC's urban school partners to provide support to classroom teachers, the opportunity became available. A primary goal of Urban Immersion is to raise the undergraduate teacher candidates' interest in urban teaching. If we think of "urban-ness" on a continuum, as Weiner (1999) suggests, BHS is on the more urban end. Of the 1,200 students enrolled at the time of our inquiry, most were Black (46.3%) and Hispanic (39.7%), with some White (8.3%) and Asian (5.4%) enrollment. About





half were English-language learners, and nearly 75% received free or reduced-price lunch. According to state assessment reports, the majority of students were performing below grade level and not demonstrating proficiency in the English and math standards. The urban school context provided the predominantly White suburban teacher candidates with firsthand experiences in classrooms, with effective teachers modeling culturally appropriate curricular, instructional, and assessment approaches. An underlying assumption of Urban Immersion is that there is specialized knowledge that effective urban teachers possess that goes beyond knowing content and knowing the pedagogical strategies for teaching that content (Stairs, 2003). Urban teachers must understand the social context, the bureaucratic nature of urban education, and the social service networks that support urban students (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Roger, 2002). Urban teachers should “promote college access for first-generation college goers, build social capital across schools and community organizations, and create alliances and engage in joint work with other reform-minded teachers” (p. 229). It is this conceptualization that informs the “urban” teacher preparation experiences in Urban Immersion.

Over the course of one semester, Urban Immersion students spend a full day at BHS, each week for a semester, for a total of 60–70 hours of fieldwork: In the morning, they attend an introductory course titled “Secondary Curriculum and Instruction”; they then work in classrooms with a partner all day and use 25 minutes directly after school to debrief with cooperating teachers; after that, they return for the second half of the curriculum and instruction course. The course focused not only on methods of curriculum and instruction but also on cultural diversity and urban teaching, and the afternoon session was cotaught by the professor and an exemplary teacher from BHS. The purpose of the afternoon session was to connect theories from the morning session with practices that student teachers experienced in classrooms that day; as such, the BHS collaborating instructor was invaluable to students’ learning. The collaborating instructor,

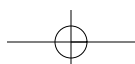
an English teacher with 7 years of experience teaching at BHS, described her role in an interview, as helping students “debrief and make sense of their day.” If it were not for afternoon inquiry sessions with a university and school-based instructor, she argued,

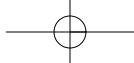
I think some of the students might miss important things that were going on that day if they didn’t have a chance to work with each other . . . and I was also a lot of time providing background information . . . that they wouldn’t have. They needed that context there.

Work in classrooms and assignments related to this work (i.e., journal entries, focused observations, lesson reflections) fulfilled students first early field experience, or prepracticum. Student teachers at BC complete three prepractica over three semesters before performing full-time student teaching their senior year, and they complete course work fulfilling a double major in a content area and education. Therefore, BC’s teacher education program nurtures the learning-to-teach process over time, and Urban Immersion is a critical first step in this process.

Prior research conducted by the professor found that students were overwhelmingly positive about working in the same classroom with a student teaching partner: Over six semesters, 96% of participants reported that it was *valuable* or *very valuable* to student teach with a partner. One student teacher described the experience in an interview: “I felt that the fact we were learning about teaching essentially while we were teaching was really helpful.” The cooperating teachers were pleased with the new arrangement as well. In open-ended surveys collected during the 1st year of Urban Immersion, cooperating teachers revealed that they initially found it challenging to adjust to partnered, actively participating student teachers because it was so different from their experiences hosting BC prepracticum students in the past; but as one English teacher with 9 years of experience said, “this is much better.”

After initial challenges, cooperating teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the new expectations. Most shared that having





other adults in the room helped them to prepare engaging, hands-on activities that they would otherwise feel overwhelmed implementing by themselves. A psychology teacher with 26 years of experience said, "It was *great* to be able to break up into groups." An English teacher with 33 years of experience said,

At first I felt challenged to find a role for them, but after speaking with them, we agreed on the *Canterbury* unit. We did a great unit, with each of the three women leading a group (as did I) in writing our own *Canterbury Tales*. I loved the lesson.

Another English teacher with 33 years of experience said, "I like having two to three prepracs in the room at the same time. I think it helps them feel more comfortable and connected." A biology teacher with 4 years of experience noted, "It was useful to have the prepracs immersed in my own classes before going to observe another science teacher. It allowed the prepracs to better digest and become involved in day-to-day activities." The collaborating instructor, who also served as a cooperating teacher for partnered students, stated in an interview,

BHS teachers feel confident that they can involve the prepracs in group work and help them do their lessons and give them feedback. . . . We have a staff of people who have become much more skilled at using preservice teachers and helping preservice teachers develop.

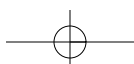
Many other outcomes were noted in the prior research. BC students revealed that they spent the majority of their time in BHS classrooms working directly with students (on average, 75% of their time). BC student teachers and their cooperating teachers also believed that they had an impact on pupils' learning. Of course, a statistical correlation cannot be drawn between BC teaching and BHS learning, but learning was evident in other ways. Preservice teachers wrote about how the BHS students anticipated them each week and called for them to help with their work. One pupil, who at the beginning of the semester told his student teachers that he was "not

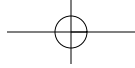
smart," wrote on his end-of-semester evaluation, "[They] help me to be not thinking that I am dumb, stupid, and not smart. They help me to do the work. They help me to be myself and no other person." Most student teachers asked their BHS students to complete evaluations of their teaching, which further supported their impact on students. After a lesson on yellow journalism cotaught by partners in a world history class, one BHS student wrote, "I usually never participate in class, and today was the first history class I ever participated in." Similarly, after having participated in a poetry lesson cotaught by partners in a ninth-grade history class, a student wrote, "I like [the lesson] because it was organized. It looked like they were teaching for years. It was awesome." Every week, every semester, cooperating teachers expressed the positive work that partners were doing, teaching well-planned and culturally responsive lessons. The cooperating teachers said that by immediately getting involved from day one in the field, university students could forge relationships with the high school students. Some noticed pupils' higher attendance on Thursdays, in anticipation of their student teachers.

Collaboration among the university instructor, the prepracticum supervisors from the university, the high school teacher who cotaught the university course, and the numerous cooperating teachers enhanced the learning opportunities for all involved. As one university supervisor said, in a note to the supervisors who would follow in her footsteps the next year, "I can guarantee, you will learn more about yourself as a teacher, mentor, and leader by working on-site at BHS." The prior research about Urban Immersion was promising, but the emic perspective of preservice teachers could be captured through a collaborative inquiry project for the purpose of examining their learning and sharing it with the educational community.

## The Inquiry Group

The professor extended an open invitation to her Urban Immersion cohort in fall 2004 to





form an inquiry group during spring 2005 that would examine the successes and challenges of their teacher education experience in the school–university partnership—an invitation that the five coauthoring students accepted. The motivation to organize a collaborative research study in the inquiry stance tradition was to practice the ideals of the teacher education program as well as produce something powerful for readers in the teacher education community. The outcomes of partnered student teaching, as expressed in this article, come directly from the knowers—the meanings of which were constructed by them, through their semester-long experiences, rather than by a researcher through his or her interpretation. This inquiry experience created a shift in the power dynamic between the professor and her students. This shift to collegiality was likely facilitated by their conducting the research while the professor was no longer teaching them, but it also serves as evidence of the collaborative dispositions of the participants.

The five female students as coauthors completed Urban Immersion as sophomores in fall 2004: Caitlin, Lindsay, Christen, and Ryan were interested in teaching English, and Elizabeth was interested in teaching biology. Caitlin and Lindsay worked as partners in the ninth-grade classroom of the coinstructor for the site-based course. Christen and Ryan worked in 11th- and 12th-grade regular and special education classrooms, each with a male partner, and Elizabeth worked in 10th-grade regular and special education classrooms, also with a male partner. These five students had overall positive experiences in Urban Immersion and felt as though they had something to share with the teacher education community about their experiences in an urban school–university partnership.

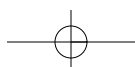
The authors approached this research from an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999). Inquiry is one of five stated themes listed on the front page of all syllabi, and it permeates the learning experiences of the teacher education program at BC. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) conceptualize the construct of inquiry as stance:

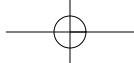
We offer the term *inquiry as stance* to describe the positions teachers and others who work together in inquiry communities take toward knowledge and its relationship to practice. . . . Teachers and student teachers who take an inquiry stance work within inquiry communities to generate local knowledge, envision and theorize their practice, and interpret and interrogate the theory and research of others. (pp. 288–289)

Cochran-Smith and Lytle acknowledge that school–university partnerships “as major sites for teacher learning [have] enormous potential” (p. 284). As such, the authors of this article decided to inquire into the student teachers’ learning experiences in Urban Immersion, with the belief that they could generate local knowledge about the learning-to-teach process that might prove useful to the larger teacher education community. Their approach to the research from the constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) challenges the hegemony of the university as generator of formal knowledge about learning to teach in partnership.

## Methods of Collaborative Inquiry

The authors conducted intense, lengthy inquiry sessions in person and online during the spring and summer of 2005, immediately following the students’ semester in Urban Immersion. This retrospective approach to analyzing learning experiences is valuable: Participants often understand more about an experience when they have some distance from it. The shared inquiry and writing approach proved intellectually challenging and fulfilling. During the first inquiry session, the professor invited students to simply talk about their experiences in Urban Immersion as she took notes. She asked them to express what they believed most influenced their learning about teaching—particularly, urban teaching. The students mentioned a number of elements within the school–university partnership yet kept coming back to the relationship with





their partner as the critical element facilitating and expanding their learning. After this 3-hour session, the professor e-mailed the notes to participants so that they could reflect on them before their next meeting, in 3 weeks.

At the second inquiry session, the instructor asked students to share their reactions to the notes from the first inquiry session and their thoughts about the relationships with their partners. At this meeting, the coauthors revealed that partnered field experiences successfully promoted the learning of four of the students and presented some challenges for the fifth student and so determined that they needed to further explore why. They knew that they each had some clear ideas and perspectives, but they needed a way to formalize their thoughts. Thus, each student decided to review her weekly Urban Immersion reflection journals from the previous semester and write a reflective essay about why and how their partners influenced their learning experiences in Urban Immersion; the professor did the same, from her perspective as a participant observer of partnered student teachers, beginning with a review of her field notes from that semester.

At the next inquiry session, the professor and students decided to read one another's reflections and note themes that they saw emerging. This open-coding process by novice researchers worked well because the professor encouraged them to keep it simple: What was the sense that they were getting, line by line, as they read each essay? What story did they hear from each participant? How was learning promoted or constrained by partners? One student aptly suggested that each researcher use a different colored pen to distinguish her coding from others', thereby proving helpful during the discussion phase of the session. After coding, the coauthors engaged with one another for several more hours about what salient and recurring ideas were evident in their writing and discussions. Eight hours of concentrated reading and discussion focused the researchers on three clear themes about partnered field experiences (as shared in the next section). Each author volunteered to write a section of the article (some chose to collaboratively co-

author sections); drafts were shared by e-mail and then discussed in person at two more lengthy inquiry sessions; deadlines for further rounds of drafts, revisions, and online inquiry were set; and the manuscript came to fruition over the next 2 months. Through finals and students' moving home for the summer, the group stayed connected by e-mail, and the inquiry and revision process moved forward with full participation of all authors.

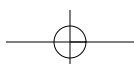
The systematic process by which the authors came to conceptualize and construct this article, as just described, was an encouraging research and learning experience that could be replicated by other students and professors—that is, novice and experienced scholars—who operate from an inquiry stance with an interest in collaboratively examining promising teacher education practices. Employing a somewhat unconventional approach to data collection and analysis, the process hinged on discussion among participants to make meaning of their data, which came in the form of inquiry meeting notes, reflective journals and essays, and field notes. In the next sections, the authors elaborate on the three main themes that emerged from data analysis.

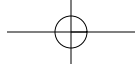
## Learning Opportunities of Partnered Student Teaching

The authors suggest three reasons why partnered student teaching fostered learning to teach in an urban school–university partnership: First, partnering provided comfort in a diverse school environment and in the role of teacher; second, it enhanced support for planning and delivering curriculum and instruction; and, third, it fostered development as reflective practitioners and critical thinkers. Here each theme is elaborated with examples drawn from participants' experiences, as documented in their reflective journals and essays.

### Comfort in a Diverse Environment

The first theme that emerged from the inquiry was that partnered student teaching provided





comfort in a diverse school environment and in the role of teacher. There were initially mixed reactions among the class of first-time student teachers when they were told that they would be teaching with partners. Christen felt insulted that she was given a partner. As a competitive student enrolled in a competitive university, she was predisposed to view another person's sharing educational and professional space as that person's encroaching upon, even threatening, her success. She wondered, would the students or the cooperating teacher like her partner more than they liked her? Would she get along with her partner? Would they share the same views about teaching? Despite their initially mixed reactions, however, most students found comfort in having partners work with them in classrooms. That is, in their emerging role as teacher, particularly in a diverse urban setting, student teachers found it comforting to work in classrooms with partners.

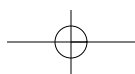
Upon entering the urban high school in which they would be student teaching, many of the student teachers felt uncomfortable in their new surroundings: They were in a different role; they were placed with partners; and they found the atmosphere of the urban public school drastically different from that of their own high school experiences. Many student teachers thought that their partners helped them address their apprehension about being in a new environment and embarking on a new path—namely, that of teaching for the first time. For example, Lindsay felt comfortable being in her ninth-grade English classroom with her partner Caitlin because she was nervous about teaching a class of 30 linguistically and culturally diverse students at once. Although Caitlin originally felt frustrated being paired with another prepracticum student, she felt comfortable when it came to planning lessons because Lindsay was in the same classroom and could provide her with ideas about activities that might be better suited for their class. Lindsay and Caitlin cotaught four lessons to their ninth-grade English classes and felt great benefit to having each other to lean on in the planning and delivery stages of instruction.

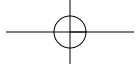
Other student teachers opted to teach separate lessons at separate times, but they still shared that they felt comfortable knowing that their partners were watching them—partners who had the same experience level and could see their teaching styles and methods from a similar viewpoint. Christen taught solo lessons, but she felt comfortable knowing that her partner was watching her interact with the class because he understood her perspective as a fellow student teacher. She also learned much from watching his lessons, gathering ideas about curriculum, instruction, and classroom management from him.

No matter what the student teachers' original reactions were to the idea of having partners in their classroom experience, most agreed that they found the presence of another student teacher to be extremely beneficial to their overall experience during the prepracticum and in their growth as teachers. Although discomfort in the classroom is one of the obstacles that student teachers may face in the beginning of their teaching experience, this group of student teachers felt their comfort level greatly increase because of their partners' presence. The student teachers developed different relationships with their respective partners, but most found comfort in knowing that they had someone with whom they could share their fears, frustrations, questions, and successes. As a result, the students were developing their teaching identities, which, as Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues, combine their past school experiences and their current school contexts with images of the kind of teachers whom they want to become.

### Support for Planning and Delivering Effective Instruction

A second theme that emerged from the inquiry is that the partnerships in student teaching supported the process of planning and delivering effective instruction. Compared to one person, two people brought a larger pool of ideas to the classroom, on different methods and teaching strategies, so partners provided a wealth of ideas regarding effective planning,





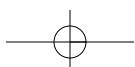
instruction, and classroom management. In an early field experience, student teachers usually want as many ideas and as much constructive criticism as possible. With two partners in the same position—that of having limited classroom experience—student teaching becomes more effective in several ways. Partners can discuss multiple ideas on lesson planning, to differentiate instruction to the needs of the class—attending especially to the linguistic and cultural-diversity characteristic of urban school settings. While planning, the partners can brainstorm the best ways to deliver the content and provide for effective instruction. Finally, both partners can develop valuable classroom management skills through observation of each other and through participation in the on-site methods course meetings, and they can work on incorporating the individual learning needs of each student in the class. Successful lesson planning must connect the background knowledge of the students to the new material and so provide for the needs of the students in the classroom (Callahan, Clark, & Kellough, 2002). The partnered student teachers had a broader base of ideas to choose from when determining what they would teach in a lesson and how they would structure it. At BHS, Caitlin and Lindsay wanted their ninth-grade English class to be connected with and interested in the topic that they were teaching. Upon finding out the cultural background of each student in the class, the two decided to teach a lesson on the Harlem Renaissance by highlighting several Langston Hughes poems, a poet whom the class had previously studied. The pair decided that culturally relevant pedagogy (Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) is crucial to ensuring that students connect with the lesson and relate to the topic. Many of the students were African American and so appreciated the study of Hughes's poetry in conjunction with the Harlem Renaissance. The partnered student teachers regularly brainstormed and planned culturally relevant lessons together, and they felt as though they grew in this important skill.

In Lindsay and Caitlin's class, one student was Muslim and was excused from class each

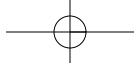
day at a certain time to pray. The partnered student teachers brainstormed a way to teach so that "Marla" would not miss too much class when she left. Thus, Marla was placed next to one of the more organized students in the class so that her questions could be answered when she returned. Also, Caitlin and Lindsay tried to plan the lesson so that the class would be doing group or individual work when Marla had to leave so that she could easily integrate back into the activity when she returned. In these ways, the student teacher partners planned lessons and taught them around the cultural needs of the students—an extremely important aspect of effective teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Weiner, 1999).

One of the most crucial aspects of teaching is embracing effective teaching methods and modes of delivery. When student teachers are partnered, each can learn much from the other, either imitating or modifying one's methods. These student teachers found it helpful to observe other beginning teachers and to determine which things worked or failed for them. Observing another student teacher provides a perspective different from that obtained while viewing a veteran teacher, who is comfortable in front of the class and possesses a repertoire of strategies. In the case of prepracticum partners Lindsay and Caitlin, Caitlin liked to teach using many handouts; she passed them out and had the students follow along while she and they discussed the information. Lindsay, however, preferred to instruct using an overhead projector; she modeled many of her student expectations on the overhead, what she wanted students to think about or do. A benefit of paired student teaching is that the prepracticum student teachers combine their preferred methods. While teaching, Lindsay and Caitlin produced a handout of the overhead, thus accommodating the diverse leaning needs of visual and auditory learners.

Developing strong classroom management is another fundamental part of teaching. A teacher must clearly express to students what the expectations are and what the consequences will be if the class does not meet the







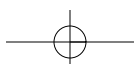
expectations. Caitlin and Lindsay had different methods of management. When students were disrespectful in the classroom, Caitlin tended to stop and wait for the students to settle down. Lindsay usually mentioned the name of the student who was disrupting the class, thereby drawing attention to the behavior that was unacceptable. Both methods can be effective means of management, but when the pair saw how the other handled the class, it gave each teacher new ideas to try for herself. Lindsay found that Caitlin's "I'll wait" method worked for some of her classes. By observing Caitlin, she now had a broader range of skills to draw from when trying to manage a class.

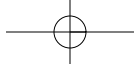
Lindsay and Caitlin also found that an extensive lesson plan, as well as well-chosen instructional methods, had as much to do with excellent classroom management as did making clear the classroom routines. When considering that their two ninth-grade classes were to learn about tone one week, the partners agreed that an identical lesson would not suit the needs of all students in both classes. One class was much more active than the other and had trouble focusing its attention, even for short periods of time. Lindsay and Caitlin agreed that they needed to modify their lesson plan for the more active class, from a whole-class discussion to a partnered activity. In this way, the students would all be directly engaged in the assigned task on a more individualized level. The teachers could walk around and directly observe the pairs, thereby ensuring that they understood the concept of tone. Many of the students needed this direct attention to be successful in the task; as such, the class was well managed when the student teacher partners brainstormed ways to meet the needs of the class.

### **Development as Reflective Practitioners and Critical Thinkers**

One of the most powerful outcomes for participants of the partnered student teaching experience at BHS was a heightened awareness of the classroom and school environment, marked by a willingness to actively reflect on the prepracticum experience and develop crit-

ical thinking skills. With roots in Dewey's (1933) philosophy and with support from a number of contemporary scholars (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Schon, 1983; Valli, 1997; Zeichner & Liston, 1987), reflection has become an important outcome in teacher education programs. The authors agreed that the most valuable aspect of the partner relationship was the presence of two parties (and, thus, two perspectives) observing the same classes and the same cooperating teachers. Talking is a form of learning, and the student teachers found that they had learned a great deal from their partner relationships and the dialogues generated therein. Casual conversations throughout the day provided an outlet for stress and anxiety in a new professional and sociocultural environment. Infused with pedagogical knowledge provided by the on-site methods course, informal student-to-student dialogues addressed everything from stressful first lesson plans to struggles adjusting to an urban teaching environment. Having someone else in the classroom prompted questions and discussions that would have far less likely occurred had students been alone in single placements. Overall, student teachers found it easy to approach fellow prepracticum student teachers (and partners in particular) with questions, concerns, and comments. Sometimes it was far less stressful asking for the opinion or informal advice of another student teacher—that is, a professional equal—as opposed to a full-practicum student teacher, a cooperating teacher, or a prepracticum supervisor from the university, whose professional authority proved intimidating. The professional gap between preservice teachers and their teacher educators, as well as the obvious power dynamic, was sometimes daunting and thus served as a hindrance to questioning, reflection, and growth. As prepracticum students, the five coauthors felt comfortable in honestly evaluating, with someone of the same professional status, their own teaching and that of their cooperating teachers. This common ground largely eliminated the censoring effects that the existing power dynamic imposed between student teachers and their superiors. Christen found that having her





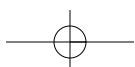
partner “Jim” in the same classroom, observing the same things that she did, encouraged her to approach him with questions about what they witnessed together. The common ground of their shared classroom experience made it easy to talk about what they observed—something that probably would not have existed had they had different cooperating teachers. Had Christen been in a single-placement setting, she would regularly witness a teacher do something; she would have a question about what she saw; and she would either forget about it or feel awkward in having to explain her question to the cooperating teacher or some other professional at a later time. In the partnered situation, she could simply turn to Jim and immediately ask him a question in situ. She could ask him what he thought about the way that their teacher responded to a certain question or how their teacher spoke when a student needed to be removed from the classroom for being disruptive. The partners critically examined what they saw, then shared their opinions—opinions that, according to Christen, would have been difficult to validate and voice had she been observing alone. As a student new to the teaching field, she believed that her opinions were not worth much because of her lack of experience. Who was she to question the methods of an experienced, professional teacher? Similarly, many of the other prepracticum students wondered if it was appropriate to question their cooperating teachers’ actions.

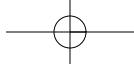
On one occasion, Christen mentioned to Jim that she disagreed with one of the teaching methods that their cooperating teacher employed. Rather than have the whole class working on something together, the teacher had the learning-disabled students in her classroom working on several different assignments. She would walk from table to table, explaining objectives and starting students with their work. Christen saw the teacher’s approach as a waste of time—she asked Jim, “Don’t you think it would be easier and more effective to teach all the students the same thing at the same time?” He disagreed, reminding her that in the urban environment (especially, BHS), students often had a num-

ber of factors, such as family commitments and long commutes, that prevented them from being in school every day and that this factor made it difficult for them to learn together. In addition, the students had various learning needs: Some needed help with reading; others had difficulty processing information; and still others had trouble focusing on academic tasks. For those reasons, it was beneficial to individualize instruction.

Jim’s differing opinion, along with the evidence that he used to support his argument, led Christen to reexamine her views of her cooperating teacher’s instructional choices. By the end of the semester, she changed her mind and had actually grown to admire and appreciate aspects of her teacher’s approach. Today, she employs a number of lessons based on this teacher’s methods. Without Jim’s perspective, she most likely would have maintained her initial opinion and learned far less. His views, whether they validated or refuted hers, were integral in developing Christen’s ability to think critically about what she observed and what her reactions were.

For their second prepracticum, Christen and Lindsay were placed in a suburban school with one other student teacher from their semester of Urban Immersion. Although they drove to school together, the three taught alone, all in separate classrooms. Despite their single placements, the three students were eager to talk about their days at BHS during their commute, reflecting on everything from teaching styles to student behavior. They were also eager to observe and be observed by one another. The critical reflection and peer communication encouraged by the Urban Immersion experience at BHS continued to manifest itself in later teaching environments, thereby establishing healthy and dynamic career habits for BC’s future teachers. Looking back on her professional progress and success during her second semester, Christen saw constant evidence of what she learned in her experience at BHS. She was confident in her opinions, and she was eager to critically assess not only her own teaching skills but also those of her cooperating teacher and others whom she observes. At Christen’s closeout meeting—





that is, a final discussion among Christen, her cooperating teacher, and her supervisor before the completion of her second semester as a prepracticum teacher—Christen was inundated with praise for her ability to reflect on her work and observations. Whenever she finished teaching a lesson, after the last student had departed, she would explode, rattling off her strengths and weaknesses, assessing what went well and what went poorly. Her cooperating teacher and supervisor rarely had more to add. Christen attributes this heightened ability to critically evaluate her teaching performance to the reflection promoted by her partnered student teaching at BHS a semester before. In Jim's company, she quickly became comfortable asking questions and making judgments that shaped her effectiveness as both a teacher and an observer. She gained worthwhile skills that continue to be an invaluable asset inside and outside the classroom.

Elizabeth also grew as a reflective practitioner and critical thinker during her partnered prepracticum. In one situation, she questioned her cooperating teacher's actions during a test in a special education classroom. The cooperating teacher administered a test that, naturally, the students were supposed to complete on their own, but they could ask the teacher clarifying questions. However, the teacher sat next to one student, "Ana," helping her through each question. Another student, "Stacey," who began taking the test quietly, had a question. The teacher ignored her question, and Stacey began to disrupt the class, demanding help. When warned by the teacher, Stacey responded with a comment regarding the unfairness of only helping Ana. The teacher told her to complete the test quietly, and she disregarded any questions that Stacey had. Stacey continued to complain and distract the other students taking the test. Finally, the teacher took Stacey's pencil away so that she could not complete the test.

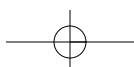
Upset by her cooperating teacher's reaction, Elizabeth felt helpless. Realizing that it was not her place to undermine the teacher's authority, she was able to turn to her partner for assurance in acquiring his opinion. Refer-

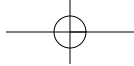
ring to the classroom management discussion that they had in their on-site methods course, Elizabeth and her partner engaged in discussion that allowed Elizabeth to incorporate the concept of teacher-induced behavior. Elizabeth believed that Stacey's behavior could have been avoided if the teacher had not unfairly favored Ana. Therefore, Elizabeth thought that not being able to complete the test was an inappropriate consequence. The methods course allowed Elizabeth and her partner to dissect the situation in terms of the urban environment as well. *Is what I just observed an unavoidable part of urban teaching or simply a poor decision by this teacher in this moment?* Elizabeth and her partner discussed the situation and worked it out together. This process was informative and self-validating in many respects, and it served to assuage Elizabeth's feeling of helplessness. Without the student teacher partnership, reflection would likely not have been as extensive.

## Challenges of Partnered Student Teaching

Much of this article outlines the strengths of partnered student teaching experiences, but in this final section Ryan addresses some challenges to this model. Ryan developed a superficial relationship with her partner; as such and for the purpose of this article, she drew from her experience to outline some potential pitfalls of partnerships in field experiences. These challenges include random partner assignments, fundamental differences between partners, and competition and anxiety induced by the partner relationship—all of which contributed to a loss of opportunities to reflect and feel supported by a peer.

The first difficulty that arises in a partnered learning atmosphere lies in deciding the partnerships. In the Urban Immersion experience, partners were randomly assigned by the professor, according to the concentrations that each student was studying (e.g., biology, English). The students gave no input and did not influence the assignments in any way. When partners are assigned randomly, each student is





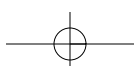
initially less invested in the partnership because he or she had no part in creating it. By being allowed to choose their own partners, students will less likely face challenges developing a partner relationship because they were granted choice in the decision-making process. Assigning partners, however, could enrich the experience by making it more like a real occupational setting in that most people do not choose their coworkers; furthermore, most partners in Urban Immersion were able to develop meaningful, supportive relationships despite random assignments.

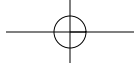
Second, although having a partner in the classroom can provide comfort, it can decrease one's progress as a teacher when fundamental differences between partners cannot be overcome. Whether it be cultural, political, social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, or otherwise, the reality of a partnered learning experience is that there will be differences between student teachers that may inhibit their ability to form a meaningful relationship. This can be a complicated obstacle to overcome because students are required to spend an entire day together attending the methods course on-site and working in classrooms. If these differences are serious enough, the potential benefits of partnered learning are greatly decreased, if present at all.

Third, an individual's comfort level can be challenged in partnered student teaching because of the inherent feelings of competition between student teachers, as mentioned earlier. Consider two students of the same level who have the same requirements and expectations in the same course and who have the same amount of previous knowledge and experience in the educational field. If they are placed in the same classroom all day long, they may very well have a tendency to compete with each other for the respect and approval of the cooperating teacher, the methods course professor, or the high school students. There may be a tendency for each student teacher to individually impress the cooperating teacher, which detracts from the ability of partnered student teachers to collaborate with each other. Therefore, they may have an inability to feel comfortable with each other or work together cooperatively.

In Ryan's experience, she and her partner "John" taught the same lesson but separately—that is, to two different classes. They decided to plan the lesson together only because it seemed like less work than that needed to independently plan a formal lesson for observation. Doing so added to the discomfort of the situation because Ryan was being observed and assessed not only by a supervisor but also by the cooperating teacher, the students, and a peer with whom she was not particularly comfortable. The fact that they taught the same lesson to two different classes also contributed to the feeling of competition because they were able to compare themselves and their effectiveness with a relatively low number of variables. Although a partnership could provide an extra mind with which to generate ideas, an unsuccessful partnership does not challenge either student teacher in the partnership to discuss a variety of teaching styles or methods by which to implement a lesson. Therefore, the partnership does not foster one's learning about planning and delivering an effective lesson.

These challenges led Ryan to feel as though she lost opportunities to analyze events in the classroom that regard teaching style, effective classroom management, ways in which the teacher respects or neglects cultural diversity, and other meaningful aspects of being a teacher. When partners are not inclined to discuss those events, they each lose a chance to more deeply and critically examine their own reactions. For instance, during one of the class periods in which Ryan was observing the cooperating teacher give a lecture, a student's cell phone rang. The teacher informed the student that she would confiscate his phone and that he could retrieve it at the end of the day from the office. The student refused to give it to her, and as she was calling the security office on the intercom, the student walked out the door, which was obviously a distraction to the class, as well as a direct violation of school rules. Whether the teacher's actions were appropriate, according to classroom management skills, could have been discussed between the partners. Each would have had a different perspective on how he or she could have handled the situation, and each





could have commented on what the teacher did, appropriately or not, thereby enhancing their own learning. The value of partnered student teaching is that both partners are present in the same room, evaluating the attitudes of the students and teacher, and witnessing all the events that preceded and followed the incident; thus, they would have different perspectives to discuss. When the partners do not have the ability to discuss such events with each other, they lose valuable opportunities to gain a better understanding of effective teaching and management.

The value of successful partnerships is considerable, but there are also difficulties that can arise in the partnered student teaching model. Partners should be encouraged to interact with other partners to get a better idea of how other pairings are working together. Verbal reflections should be supplemented by journal entries, focused on partners' relationships, to be given to the professor or university prepracticum supervisor. Nevertheless, the potential benefits of having a peer in the classroom who can provide comfort, who can enhance learning about lesson planning and delivery, and who can foster critical reflection far outweigh whatever risks may be involved.

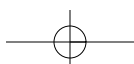
## Conclusion

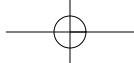
In this article, the authors argue that partnered student teaching can promote student teachers' learning, even though it presents some challenges. Drawing from their collaborative inquiry, five student teachers and a professor from Urban Immersion at BC described their school–university partnership, explained the strengths of partnering for student teachers' learning, and outlined the challenges inherent in the model. They asserted that partnered student teaching promoted student teachers' learning because it provided (1) comfort in a diverse school environment and in the role of teacher, (2) support for planning and delivering effective instruction, and (3) development as reflective practitioners and critical thinkers. Despite the challenges, the authors suggest that more teacher education

programs explore the partnered student teaching model.

The scope of this article was to explore the successes and challenges of partnered student teaching from the participants' perspectives, but this is not to suggest that others were not integrally involved in promoting preservice teacher learning. The research literature has clearly addressed the roles and influences of mentors, such as the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor, on preservice teachers' learning (Stanulis & Russell, 2000; Weasmer & Woods, 2003; Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, we believe that cooperating teachers can benefit from this arrangement. As noted earlier, Urban Immersion arose from the school partners' request to provide more help to classroom teachers; as a result, cooperating teachers responded favorably to the pedagogical opportunities created with having more than one adult in the classroom. Increasingly overcrowded and diverse classrooms may greatly benefit from decreasing the teacher-to-student ratio as we did in Urban Immersion. In addition, we hope that cooperating teachers can be reminded how novices feel while working in their classrooms. Sometimes, apprehension and feelings of inadequacy prevent preservice teachers from questioning their cooperating teachers, for fear of seeming to challenge their authority or professional judgment; as a result, they develop an overreliance on their partners for the "answers." A cooperating teacher showing equal commitment to both partners can go a long way in inviting preservice teachers to become part of the larger professional community. Further research is warranted to understand how partnered student teaching influences cooperating teachers' and university supervisors' practices and learning.

We think that it is important that none of the major players involved were the most important resources for these participants—not the cooperating teachers, not the on-site university instructors (and their courses and activities), and not the university supervisors. In light of this inquiry, the main contribution to PDS knowledge is that incorporating student teaching dyads into school–university partnerships seems particularly promising, given that



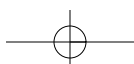


these partnerships are designed around the principle of collaboration among new and experienced educators from K–12 schools and universities. Notably, the inquiry process led the teacher candidates to zoom in on the relationships with their partners as being most influential to their learning, rather than their cooperating teachers, their on-site course work, or their other PDS learning activities. This may be a result of completing a first field experience and being unfamiliar with how to effectively tap into the numerous resources available to them, including their cooperating teachers and other teacher educators involved in their partnership preparation.

The authors believe that the local knowledge that they generated from their inquiry stance could prove useful for designing and implementing paired student teaching placements in other school–university partnerships. They also believe that their collaborative inquiry into this topic provided insight directly from the participants in a teacher education experience not often evident in the research literature. Their inquiry strategies could be employed by other veteran and novice scholars who have experiences that they wish to interrogate, analyze, and theorize for their own purposes and for the larger educational community. <sup>SUP</sup>

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