



“I Didn’t Know of a Better Way to Prepare to Teach”: A Case Study of Paired Student Teaching Abroad

By Stephanie Behm Cross & Alyssa Hadley Dunn

It has been a year since Sarah¹ and Brian traveled to Malmo, Sweden, as part of a fellowship through their U.S. teacher preparation program. Their experience was unique and life changing, not only because it occurred in another country but because they completed their student teaching in a paired format. They planned and implemented all of their lessons together, worked with the same mentor teacher, and jointly posed and solved problems in the classroom. Their experience of paired student teaching abroad is the subject of this study.

Research has shown the positive benefits of completing student teaching abroad (Bradfield-Kreider, 1999; Casale-Briannola, 2005; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Germain, 1998; Mahon & Stachowski, 1990; Marx & Moss, 2011; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996), including increased cultural sensitivity and competence (Fung King Lee, 2011; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Phillion & Malewski, 2011), confidence (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013; Vall & Tennison, 1992), and global awareness (Fung King Lee, 2011; Romano, 2008). Separate literature has illustrated the potential advantages of paired student teaching, whereby two student teachers work with one cooperating teacher in the same classroom and complete the same

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required assignments for their entire practicum experience (e.g., Baker & Milner, 2006; Bullough et al., 2003; Dang, 2013; Dee, 2013; Smith, 2004). However, no empirical research to date combines these two interventions to improve traditional student teaching. Our research on paired student teaching abroad fills the gap in the literature, and our findings demonstrate the possibility of using such a model to improve student teachers' experiences and development. Using data from interviews, videos, lesson plans, written reflections, collaborative journals, and formative and summative assessments from Sarah and Brian's placement in Malmo, we explored one central research question: How does paired student teaching abroad influence preservice teachers' experiences while learning to teach?

Review of the Literature

Student Teaching Experiences

Most teachers view field-based experiences, and student teaching specifically, as the most valuable and beneficial part of their preparation and suggest that most of what they know comes from firsthand experience (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dunn, Donnell, & Stairs, 2010; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Many policy documents also speak to the importance of student teaching in learning to teach; a recent report from the Council of Chief State School Officers (2012) on transforming educator preparation concluded that "quality of preparation often determines the success a teacher has in the classroom . . . especially in the first few years in their respective roles" (p. 3). What we know for certain is that teacher education, and student teaching specifically, matters.

Despite the assumed importance of field experiences in learning to teach, many stakeholders problematize the traditional model of student teaching. For example, 30 years ago, Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1985) described the "cross-purposes pitfall" in teacher education. As the authors explained, K-12 schools are generally not set up as places for teacher education; when preservice teachers enter classrooms, they are confronted with the responsibility of teaching while still learning how to teach. As a result, there are often missed opportunities for learning to teach and for critical reflection on teaching practices. Not much has changed today; the traditional student teaching model frequently does not prepare teachers adequately for their entry into the profession, and many student teachers report feelings of frustration and isolation and engage in "survival only" mode (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagan & Kessels, 1999; Zeichner, 2010).

This survival mode may be related, in part, to the lack of purposeful field placements. For example, as Zeichner and Liston (1996) reported, K-12 field placements are often dictated by cooperating teacher availability and administrative considerations rather than by what is best for teacher learning. The nature of relationships within typical student teaching placements might also add to this survival mode;

Valencia et al. (2009) found that the mentor teachers, university supervisors, and student teachers in their study were facing competing demands and that there were numerous instances of lost opportunities for student teachers to learn to teach. In a related study focused on relationships among student teachers and their mentors, Lane, Lacefield-Parachini, and Isken (2003) found that most mentor–student teacher relationships were “unidirectional, based on the transmission concept of a mentor/mentee relationship where there is just one learner and one teacher” (p. 56).

In response, many teacher education programs have started working closely with local K–12 systems to develop professional development schools aimed at better supporting student teachers in the field (Bohan & Many, 2011). Faculty in other programs are starting to investigate alternate models of student teaching, such as coteaching between mentor teachers and student teachers. Still others have investigated what happens when two student teachers from the same university program are placed within the same classroom to engage in student teaching experiences. This paired student teaching context is discussed in what follows.

Despite the importance placed on student teaching internships, scholars in the field continue to point out that student teaching has a limited research base and suggest more studies focused on preservice teacher (PST) learning throughout student teaching. In 2011, Anderson and Stillman argued that “student teaching remains a ‘black box’; little is known about how student teaching enables (or constrains) PST learning” (p. 446). A more recent review suggested that the field remains unclear on what PSTs learn from student teaching (Anderson & Stillman, 2013).

Paired Student Teaching Placements

Paired student teaching, or the placement of two student teachers in the same classroom, is a newly researched innovation that has developed to address shortcomings in typical student teaching placements. It also seeks to address the increasing difficulty for field placement personnel and teacher education faculty to secure the number of placements necessary for their teacher candidates (Dee, 2013). In addition, as Gardiner and Robinson (2011) suggested, “preservice teacher preparation is the optimal time to develop skills of and favorable dispositions toward collaboration” (p. 9).

Most studies on paired placements within student teaching and practicum experiences have reported positive results. For example, Bullough et al. (2002, 2003) found that paired student teachers came to appreciate the value of working closely with other teachers when learning to teach and felt that feedback throughout student teaching was more conversational and less one-directional. Their paired student teachers appeared to take more risks related to instructional innovation and also appeared to positively impact student learning. In a follow-up study, Birrell and Bullough (2005) found that seven of the eight student teachers reported that their paired student teaching experience made them prepared and successful in

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first-year teaching, specifically in their understanding of the importance of critical feedback, their understanding of students, their openness to new ideas, and their increased confidence.

Other studies have shown similarly positive results. Dee (2013) reported that student teaching pairs found the feedback from their peers highly valuable in their development as new teachers and also added that the paired experience provided emotional security and reduced stress. Baker and Milner (2006) found that paired student teachers learned more from their mentor teachers than did students who taught alone.

Another study focused on paired student teaching at the secondary level reported both strengths and weaknesses to the paired student teaching model (Nokes et al., 2008). The benefits included high levels of confidence and instructional innovation by student teachers; a decrease in time spent on the mundane tasks of teaching, which freed up more time for planning and reflection; and reports of increased teacher attention by the pupils of student teachers. On the other hand, this study also reported tensions between some student teacher pairings.

Other researchers have focused specifically on the collaboration that occurs during paired student teaching. For example, Dang (2013) found that “conflicts within the collaboration, for example, as manifest in the negotiation of teachers’ multiple identities as friends, students and becoming teachers, opened up initial opportunities to learn” (p. 58) and suggested that more attention needs to be paid to the process of collaboration within student teacher pairs. Similarly, Gardiner and Robinson (2011) found that tensions arise from “both the act and perceived value of collaboration” (p. 8) and recommended that teacher educators understand where and why PSTs struggle in their peer relationships. Taken together, the paired student teaching context seems to help push back against student teachers engaging in “survival mode” during their teaching internship. Instead, it calls for increased collaboration and provides more space and time to focus on reflection and learning about teaching.

International Student Teaching Experiences

Studies focused on student teaching abroad have highlighted that living and teaching abroad increases PSTs’ (inter)cultural awareness, knowledge, sensitivity, and competence, as well as their ability to understand, respect, engage with, and ultimately teach diverse cultural groups (Bradfield-Kreider, 1999; Casale-Briannola, 2005; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Dunn, Dotson, Cross, Kesner, & Lundahl, 2014; Fung King Lee, 2011; Germain, 1998; Mahon & Stachowski, 1990; Marx & Moss, 2011; Phillion & Malewski, 2011; Vall & Tennison, 1992; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Gilson and Martin (2010) found that principals were more likely to hire new teachers with international experience because they felt an overseas placement helped the teachers develop a global worldview; a better understanding of diverse cultures; and increased confidence, ambition, and tolerance. Mahon and

Cushner (2002) concluded that student teaching abroad “can be the catalyst that starts teachers on a path of learning from others: their students, their colleagues, their community, and their world” (p. 7), while other studies have reported that international teaching experiences encourage PSTs to “question all areas of their teaching knowledge, skills, and beliefs” (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013, p. 65).

Romano (2008) investigated the emerging critical consciousness of student teachers through a Freirean lens. She argued that students who taught abroad returned to the United States more confident and ready to serve as “cultural workers” in their schools because they had the opportunity to transform their vision of teaching and their own identities. Like Vall and Tennison (1992), Romano (2008) explained that her student teachers, while abroad,

see everything about a school as “new” or “different” . . . providing an invaluable opportunity for the new teacher to really see, to become consciously aware of the physical, the social, and the academic manifestations of the life of a school. (p. 92)

Concurrent with the benefits of global awareness and increased confidence and reflective thinking, student teaching abroad presents some challenges. In addition to culture shock, cited by many researchers as a difficulty understanding and adapting to new cultures (e.g. Germain, 1998), Quezada (2004) identified difficulties including adapting to the curriculum and feeling isolated from peers. What happens, then, when the benefits of international teaching are combined with the opportunity to student teach with a peer? Will the benefits of learning from others, as Mahon and Cushner found, be increased? No research to date, however, has focused on paired international student teaching experiences, and this is therefore the focus of our work.

Theoretical Framework

In addition to examining our participants’ narratives in light of literature on paired student teaching, we analyze their experience through the theoretical lens of Freirean banking versus problem-posing education (Freire, 1990). We argue that, although traditional student teaching placements offer components of problem-posing education, they often reflect a banking model of education. In contrast, we suggest that paired student teaching placements are more closely aligned with problem-posing theory, with a more dialogical and balanced relationship between teacher and student. Freire argued that problem-posing education results not only in more knowledge but in more humanity: “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72).

Freire’s (1990) theory offers new insight into the ways that student teaching placements have long been structured as an apprentice model, whereby the more experienced cooperating/mentor teacher deposits his or her knowledge into the less experienced student teacher. Such a relationship automatically places PSTs in

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subordinate roles, even if they have previous experience with content and pedagogy. Like the banking model, mentor teachers are often viewed by the administration and university (even if they do not self-identify as such) as the authorities who “deposit” knowledge about teaching and learning into the PSTs. We are not arguing that all student teaching placements are evidence of the banking model or that such placements do not also contain elements of problem-posing education. Rather, we assert that traditional models of student teaching run the risk, intentionally or not, of serving to dehumanize PSTs by treating them as mere receivers of knowledge rather than as partners in the learning process.

Paired student teaching placements are one way to structure the student teaching experience in a way that better utilizes the prior knowledge of student teachers and views them as co-constructors in their education. As Freire (1990) noted, in a problem-posing relationship, “no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world” (p. 80). We return to Freire’s model in our findings and discussion to analyze how this individual case represents a careful movement away from banking concepts to problem-posing opportunities for student teachers.

Methodology

Participants and Setting

Sarah and Brian completed their student teaching internship in spring 2012, during their final semester in a middle-grades teacher certification program at a large, urban research university in the southeastern United States. The program focused specifically on preparing teachers for urban settings, and though there were not many opportunities that allowed for student teaching abroad, the university as a whole encouraged international experiences. In fall 2011, Brian and Sarah both applied for an international student teaching fellowship in Sweden, where English is a primary language. Of the six students who applied for the fellowship, they were two of the three students selected to participate. Although Brian and Sarah had taken classes together in previous semesters, they were not friends, nor even acquaintances, before they left.

Sarah was a nontraditional student who was preparing to teach middle school language arts. She was 28 years old during her time in Malmo and, as the oldest international student who lived in the dormitory with other traveling students, became known as “Mama.” Sarah had lived in the same city in the southeastern United States for her entire life, and though she had traveled briefly around Europe in high school and to Turkey to visit her husband’s family in recent years, Sarah had never spent any significant length of time abroad. Brian, like Sarah, was preparing to teach middle school language arts. Brian was 25 years old while in Malmo and had lived in the same southeastern U.S. city as Sarah from the

time he was 3 years old. He had never traveled internationally prior to his trip to Malmo.

To help them prepare for their semester abroad, Brian and Sarah completed online Swedish language modules during the fall semester and also met with the director of international programs at the university several times to finalize travel arrangements and school placements. When they first arrived in Malmo, Brian and Sarah also participated in their host university's weeklong orientation on education trends in Sweden.

Brian and Sarah were both placed at an international school in one of the most diverse cities in Sweden. Malmo,² located in the south of Sweden on the border with Denmark, is home to a large immigrant and refugee population. Their school utilized the International Baccalaureate (IB) Curriculum, and all courses were taught in English. Sarah and Brian were placed in the Middle Years Program to work with 11- to 16-year-olds. According to Brian and Sarah, "a large proportion of the students are multilingual with English being their second language. [Our school] is a very multicultural school with students from all over the world." The student teaching structure in Malmo was very similar to structures within the United States (and the structures familiar to Sarah and Brian from fall semester in local U.S. schools), with one student teacher placed with one cooperating teacher for an entire semester. Similar to their peers in the United States, Brian and Sarah would be placed in a middle-grades classroom for most of the semester and would gradually take on more and more teaching responsibilities as the semester progressed.

Brian and Sarah were originally assigned to two different mentor teachers. Brian was initially placed in a mathematics classroom and immediately felt that he was in an "uncomfortable situation." Not only was this not his primary content area but he also did not feel his mentor teacher wanted him there, and he did not support the "dictatorial style" in which the mentor conducted lessons. Owing to these challenges with his first placement teacher and because of the limited availability of other mentor teachers, Brian was eventually placed in Sarah's classroom to work alongside her and her mentor teacher, Patrik. Patrik, a 7-year veteran, had been teaching at the international school for 2 years as an English language arts teacher. According to our participants' joint writing from their Teacher Work Sample (TWS) project, Patrik "has a great rapport with the students. Most students genuinely admire and look up to him. He has a playful, yet appropriate attitude with the students." Though not initially or intentionally placed as a pair, Brian and Sarah's paired student teaching context became part of our data collection and is the focus of this case study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Through the initial data collection phase, we asked "open questions about phenomena as they occur[ed] in context" (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1316), which led

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us to a specific focus on paired student teaching when two participants specifically mentioned the importance of their partner teacher. Drawing on our theoretical lens of Freirean (Freire, 1990) banking versus problem-posing education, we were particularly interested in capturing our participants' perspectives on paired student teaching abroad. From January through May 2012, one of the authors collected course work artifacts for both Brian and Sarah. These artifacts included (a) collaborative journals that Brian and Sarah used as an ongoing "dialogue" about their student teaching experience ($n = 14$); (b) weekly lesson plans that Brian and Sarah created together ($n = 6$); (c) individual lesson analysis papers that Brian and Sarah each wrote about the lesson-planning process and curriculum ($n = 6$); (d) individual teaching reflections that Brian and Sarah each wrote after they taught ($n = 8$); and (e) a TWS, a 28-page summative assignment in which Brian and Sarah described their placement setting, implemented a curricular unit, analyzed data from pre- and postassessments, and drew conclusions about curriculum and instruction. In addition to these documents, when Brian and Sarah returned to the United States, they participated in separate interviews with one of the authors that lasted approximately 90 minutes. Interviews were semistructured and used a protocol as a conversational guide to discuss their student teaching experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for inclusion in the data set. Finally, Brian and Sarah each participated in a follow-up interview in January 2013, 1 year after their original departure to Malmo.

Data analysis began at the end of the spring 2012 semester, at the completion of the first round of data collection. In our analysis of Brian and Sarah's paired student teaching experience, we drew on grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Our goal was to use a variety of qualitative data to develop a theory that might help explain the experiences of student teachers who participate in international paired student teaching. Once all data were collected, we created an online database and two printed binders that included participant artifacts and interview transcripts. These files were reviewed separately by both researchers several times with the aim of making sense of the data and making initial notes about recurrent issues and codes in the data. Shortly after initial coding was complete, we came together to develop overall codes and concepts. Initial codes included, for example, coreflection, compromise, more time to learn about themselves, and increased confidence. We then grouped our codes into seven overall concepts that eventually evolved into three categories, which fed into our final theory related to paired student teaching abroad. Finally, in reporting our findings, we utilized participant voices as much as possible through direct quotations from a variety of data sources.

Throughout the research process, we sought to connect our theoretical framework to the ways in which we collected and analyzed our data. For example, we first chose qualitative methods because we felt this better matched Freire's commitment to dialogue. We then designed an interview protocol using semistructured, open-ended questions, with portions of the interviews being completely unstructured,

versus a more structured protocol, following on Freire's (1990) charge that "if the structure does not permit dialogue, the structure must be changed" (p. 54). Recognizing, too, that language is never neutral, we positioned our participants as subjects rather than as objects, taking care to document the ways in which power dynamics played a role in both what we were asking and how we were asking it.

Findings

On the basis of our analysis of Sarah and Brian's documents and interviews, we found that working as a pair had a positive influence on their student teaching in three concrete ways. First, Sarah and Brian demonstrated an enhanced ability to navigate their new environment and their program requirements. Second, the paired placement gave them frequent and critical opportunities for peer reflection. Finally, they expressed new levels of confidence in themselves and their teaching methods. In the following, we explore these three findings in detail using Freire's notions of humanization and subject voice.

Enhanced Ability to Navigate New Environments and Requirements

Our first major finding is that working with a peer during student teaching enhanced participants' ability to navigate their new environment and their specific student teaching requirements. As outlined in the literature review, during traditional student teaching, PSTs are expected to successfully navigate the experience with little support or guidance from anyone at the university, leading to feelings of isolation, frustration, and disconnection between university and classroom. However, the addition of another student teacher from the same program positioned Brian and Sarah as conavigators of the student teaching context and the new cultures and policies related to student teaching abroad. More specifically, we argue that paired student teaching enabled Brian and Sarah to more effectively navigate (a) the structures and required assignments of student teaching, (b) the opportunities for trying new teaching methods and exploring the type of teacher they each wanted to be, and (c) the new school policies and overall culture shock related to living abroad.

Student teaching structures. Pairing appeared to provide Brian and Sarah with in-the-moment help and relief during their student teaching. Sarah explained, "If there was a day that I wasn't feeling it or there was a day that Brian wasn't feeling it, we could fall back a little and not talk as much or not interact as much." Both Brian and Sarah referenced taking the lead or filling in when the other was "off" or feeling ill. Additionally, Brian talked extensively about supporting Sarah at the beginning of student teaching, when she was nervous to be in front of the classroom. Sarah was "scared to death," so Brian sometimes stepped in and calmed her nerves. After Sarah and Brian were both comfortable, Brian appreciated "the way that we played off each other" in the classroom.

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Working together also helped the pair complete student teaching requirements more efficiently and effectively. According to the program requirements, student teachers had to complete a TWS where they planned, implemented, and reflected lessons around a curricular theme of choice. The pair decided to focus their TWS on a poetry unit that incorporated “critical and creative writing.” Brian and Sarah were able to engage in the required planning and teaching but had the added bonus of doing so collaboratively, a skill critically important for PSTs. This collaborative planning, as Brian explained, meant “we were very proud of what we turned in and what we accomplished,” which he called an “ultimate success.” Brian also referenced their commitment to student teaching and to making things work: “Sarah and I wanted it to work. We were committed to it working. We busted our asses to make it work. . . . We went 100%.”

Opportunities for experimenting and reflecting. Paired student teaching also provided Brian and Sarah the opportunity and support to try new teaching methods and consider the type of teacher they each wanted to be. Brian recalled, “It was just a lot of experimenting and trial and error.” Different from more traditional student teaching placements, in which student teachers have to follow the plans or pacing guides set by the teacher, school, or district, Brian and Sarah were given freedom to try new things in the classroom. As Brian described in his journal, Patrik “gave us complete control over his classroom and let us run with ideas that some teachers may have thought were a little crazy.” While Sarah and Brian did “take advice from Patrik each day,” they appeared to have more time, space, and confidence to communicate with each other and reflect on the type of teacher they each wanted to be. As they explained in their TWS, “as we reflected on our lessons from each day . . . we listened to each other and told each other how we felt about the lessons.” Brian explained, “I feel like it definitely prepared me better than I think it would have [if I were] just teaching by myself in Patrik’s class. I don’t think I would have gained as much out of the experience as I did.” This continuous development, through collaborative thinking and the space to reinvent their practices and themselves, aligns with Freire’s (1990) concept of problem-posing education.

International school policies and culture shock. Finally, Brian and Sarah were able to conavigate new school policies and culture shock related to living abroad. Sarah explained, “I’m glad I was able to navigate with [Brian] because we were both in a new place with a new curriculum. Navigating it together was that much easier.” Brian expressed similar thoughts as he reflected on how difficult it was to figure out student teaching and school requirements while living abroad: “It was literally every possible thing you can think of was just crazy up in air: living situation, working situation, and personal situation.”

An important related consideration is what the student teachers learned in the international setting that they could not or would not have learned by student teaching in the United States. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to

explore this question in depth, the international context was an important feature of their paired student teaching (Dunn et al., 2014). Malmo, as a truly diverse city, offered the possibility of engaging with students from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. On one hand, Brian and Sarah's placement at an international school enhanced their opportunities to engage with diverse students; on the other hand, the English-medium feature of the school offered more similarities to U.S. schools than a traditional Swedish school may have offered. Brian and Sarah had the opportunity to teach an IB curriculum, and though there are public IB schools in the United States, neither had interned in one previously. Additionally, working with an IB curriculum with international students offered, as Brian explained, unique insight into the best ways to prepare students to "develop the intellectual, personal, emotional, and social skills needed to successfully live, learn, and work in a rapidly globalizing world." Sarah also mentioned how teaching in Malmo exposed her to a variety of alternative pedagogies, including project-based learning with assessments like videos, papers, and speeches, options that she had not witnessed in U.S. schools because of the increased testing at home. As explored in the following discussion, we argue that the international context was vital to the success of their placement, but we also see the challenges of working within an English-medium, IB school as the placement. Perhaps their learning could have been enhanced even more if they had had experience—even through observations and dialogue with students and teachers—in traditional public schools abroad.

Unique Peer Reflection Experiences

A second major finding is that paired student teaching abroad allowed our participants to engage in substantial peer reflection. During a traditional internship, student teachers may have the opportunity to reflect privately—through journals, portfolios, or other course work—or with their cooperating teachers. However, the addition of a fellow student teacher offered Sarah and Brian the chance to share their feelings and ideas with each other in unique ways. We found that peer reflection challenged Sarah and Brian to (a) give positive reinforcement and praise, (b) offer constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement, and (c) pose and solve problems together.

Working together helped our participants reflect on their teaching and share their thoughts about successful lessons, activities, and strategies. Sarah remembered that, if there was a particular suggestion that Brian had for a lesson, after they taught it together, she would tell him, "That was a great idea. I think that was amazing. It went really well. The kids really liked it." Conversely, if something did not go well, Sarah and Brian were able to be honest with each other and offer constructive criticism. This finding contradicts previous research (Smith, 2004) that negative feedback from peers is not advisable. We think this was a very important part of Brian and Sarah's relationship, as too often student teachers may only hear

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the positive feedback from their cooperating teachers. This “halo effect,” though encouraging at the time, may have a long-term detrimental effect because the students are never told what areas need targeted improvement. However, with Sarah and Brian, their honesty was a vital part of their professional relationship. Sarah explained, “I was never nervous to be critical around him. He was the same, I think. We were just able to be very open with each other, be like, ‘This lesson sucked. This was terrible or this was awesome.’ We were able to do that very openly.”

Brian shared Sarah’s feelings that having a coreflector was an important part of his overall experience. He distinguished Sarah from a typical cooperating teacher who did not have as much “insider” knowledge, because they were both intimately involved in the planning and teaching process. Brian spoke at length about how Sarah was the only one who knew enough to give him in-depth feedback and whom he trusted to be honest:

All my other [mentor] teachers [in previous semesters] tried to put a nice spin on it. Sarah had no reason to do that. She could have been like “Brian, what the hell? Why did you do that?” There was [sic] some times that she did that. . . . Having that person that was with me teaching all the time, she gave me feedback that nobody else could give me. . . . She was the only person that had all the insight.

Finally, serving as peer reflection partners enabled Sarah and Brian to pose and solve problems together. As opposed to a traditional student teaching experience where a single student teacher is moving from challenge to challenge and working independently to “put out fires” in her new classroom, Sarah and Brian were able to think more critically about the struggles and challenges in their setting. For example, Brian noted multiple times that he “learned a lot” about himself, his style of teaching, and pedagogical gaps because Sarah helped him to think in new ways about problems they were having in the classroom. Sarah also mentioned how the pair would tackle challenging students or classroom issues by talking with each other and engaging in an iterative problem-posing and -solving process. As opposed to going to their mentor teacher, Sarah recalled, “I’d go to Brian most of the time . . . cause we were teaching it and we knew what was going on.” She framed problem solving as a “challenge for us” that they would not have “learn[ed] unless we work[ed] it out together.” Furthermore, Sarah commented, “I liked the fact that we could solve problems together. It was definitely . . . part of the experience, figuring it out.” Here we see evidence that Brian and Sarah were engaging in problem-posing education.

Newly Acquired Skills and Confidence

A third finding is that paired student teaching abroad helped our participants to acquire new skills and confidence. Sarah and Brian repeatedly stated that they learned “so much” from each other, in part because “it was beneficial to see and work with somebody who had a different teaching style.” As in traditional student

teaching placements, improvements were made in their pedagogical skills. Additionally, we argue that Sarah and Brian also developed interpersonal skills related to communication and compromise, skills that are not commonly developed during solitary student teaching placements but that are fundamental for successful practice.

Pedagogical skills. Pedagogically, the pair increased their skills related to content, creativity, and classroom management. Sarah and Brian described content in terms of “ideas” for what to teach, whereas they described “creativity” as the ways they made their ideas more unique and relevant to students’ lives. Sarah believed her strength was content and noted that she brought many ideas to the table, which she was then able to “bounce off” Brian. Brian wrote that working with Sarah helped him “see topics in ways that I may not have seen otherwise.”

Working collaboratively also allowed participants to develop their creativity. For example, Sarah said her lessons would not have been as creative “had it not been for Brian [be]cause he really helped me tap that part of myself and within the classroom.” Sarah described this further in her journal: “I am learning lots of new and creative ideas from Brian. . . . I believe the best lessons have happened when we put our own ideas together.” One creative idea that the pair utilized, at Brian’s suggestion, was using popular songs to teach poetic devices. Students then wrote their own poems and collected them into a portfolio. For critical pedagogues, this may seem more traditional than revolutionary, but compared to the formats in which poetry was traditionally taught (both in Malmo and in their previous placements in the United States), Brian and Sarah found such methods to be liberating for their own practice. They saw these methods not just as adapting the norm but as transforming it in new ways for themselves and their students. Together, Brian and Sarah spoke of their utopia (of an English classroom) and then engaged in a dialogue to find ways to engage in practices consistent with this vision.

Finally, Brian and Sarah believed that their classroom management strategies improved as a result of the pairing. Classroom management is one of the most often cited worries of new PSTs and one of the things they feel is most lacking in their teacher preparation programs (LePage et al., 2005). Working with a peer for their first teaching experience alleviated some of these worries for Sarah and Brian and allowed them to experiment with different ways of managing the classroom. For instance, Sarah stated that “sometimes I would be the bad cop and Brian would be the good cop. We’d really play off each other.” As she explained, they learned to give each other “the look” to signal who was going to assume what role at a particular moment.

Part of classroom management is the focus on individual students, and working as a pair enabled Sarah and Brian to focus their attention on helping individual students who were having personal or academic challenges. This was linked to their ability to coreflect, as mentioned in the previous section, because they shared students and were able to discuss ways to intervene if a particular child was having difficulty.

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Interpersonal skills. Interpersonally, the pair increased their skills related to communication and compromise, two critical skills for successful teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Working together on a daily basis required that Sarah and Brian learn how to communicate effectively with each other, both outside and inside the classroom. Brian stated that his paired placement helped him with collegial communication, idea sharing, and support. Sarah also believed that working so closely with Brian improved their on-the-spot communication when teaching. She said, “Towards the end, we didn’t really plan who was gonna say what. We were just able to bounce off each other.”

Communication also involved a lot of compromise. Both Sarah and Brian spoke and wrote about compromise on many occasions. For example, Sarah felt that compromise was important for their planning because it helped them have a “better, concrete plan” drawn from their many ideas. She explained further,

We did a lot of compromising, a lot of compromising with what activity we would do and how we would do it, and how it would play out. We would spend—I mean, just because we had so many creative ideas between the two of us, it made it harder to plan. Because we’re, like, “Oh! What about this? No. What about this? Or what about that?” It made it more difficult to plan because there was so much in our heads that we wanted to see happen, but only have 50 minutes. There’s a lot of compromise.

Both Sarah and Brian stated that they “didn’t mind” compromising because they “learned a lot that way.” The strongest lessons that enabled successful teaching of poetry and other topics were derived from a combination of individual ideas that each brought to their planning sessions, plus new ideas that they generated together.

Confidence. In addition to pedagogical and interpersonal improvements, we also found that Sarah and Brian’s confidence increased because of their paired placement. Sarah said upon returning to the United States, “My mom said I was a different person over there. I changed, not in a bad way. She just said that ‘you’re more confident in yourself . . . very assertive.’” Sarah also believed that working with Brian and learning creative ideas from him made her “feel more confident.” Thus, for Sarah, student teaching abroad (with Brian) improved both her personal and professional confidence.

Brian also discussed how paired student teaching “helped me gain a lot more confidence.” Brian felt that he “learned a lot about going with your gut and believing in yourself from Sarah.” He elaborated that, when he is teaching,

It’s one of the only times I ever feel totally comfortable with myself even though I don’t really understand myself or anything. . . . I definitely feel like it [paired student teaching] helped me more; it really prepared me. If I was seeking a job here [in the United States], I would feel incredibly well prepared having co-taught this past semester. Honestly.

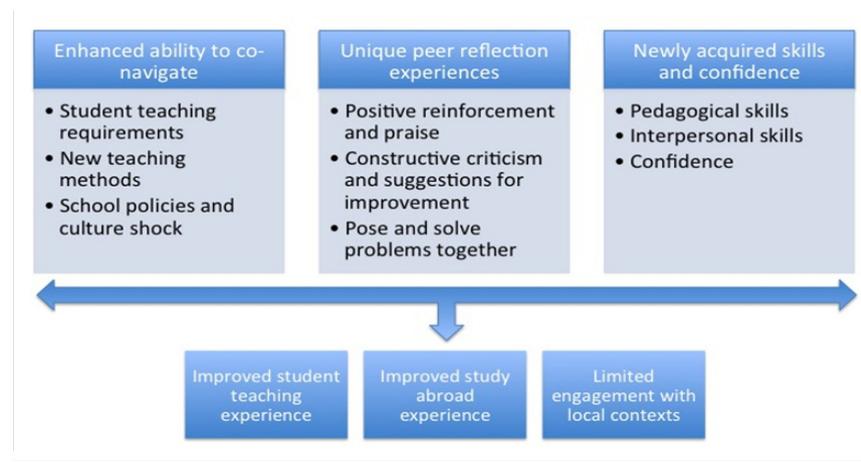
Discussion

Overall, our findings point to multiple benefits of paired student teaching abroad. Brian and Sarah were able to conavigate program requirements and new school policies as they participated in paired student teaching, while also supporting one another as they experimented with novel teaching methods. Furthermore, while conavigating these experiences, Brian and Sarah engaged in in-depth and sustained peer reflection that may not have been available to them outside of paired student teaching. They offered each other positive reinforcement and constructive criticism while posing and solving problems together. Finally, Brian and Sarah perceived new pedagogical and interpersonal skills as well as increased confidence related to their own teaching.

In addition to discovering that our study confirmed the findings of previous researchers about the benefits of paired placements on the overall student teaching experience (Baker & Milner, 2006; Birrell & Bullough, 2005; Dang, 2013; Dee, 2013; Smith, 2004), we also found unexpected outcomes of the paired format. First, we conclude that the benefits of paired student teaching, as identified earlier, also improved Sarah and Brian's overall study abroad experience. Second, we found our student teachers' enhanced ability to conavigate experiences while teaching abroad and their unique peer reflection experiences may have limited their engagement with the local contexts as they came to rely so heavily on each other. Figure 1 includes an illustration of these ideas.

The benefits of paired student teaching had a positive influence on the study abroad experience. As discussed in the literature review, there are challenges associated with studying abroad, such as culture shock. The paired student teaching

Figure 1
Outcomes of a Paired Student Teaching Relationship



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relationship mediated these challenges for Sarah and Brian, and it made the study abroad experience more productive and more personally fulfilling. For example, though Brian struggled with some personal challenges related to his self-esteem, working with Sarah on a daily basis and having her support as a conavigator and friend enabled him to overcome these difficulties and feel successful in his placement. For Sarah, who had never been abroad for an extended period and who expressed much predeparture anxiety about being in a new country, having Brian as a work partner seemed to ease her fears and make her more comfortable inside and outside the classroom.

Additionally, our findings revealed that Sarah and Brian were able to co-construct their student teaching as a space of dialogue and balance. As they began working together, Sarah and Brian's paired activities—lesson planning, constant and critical reflection, and daily teaching—led them to be critical thinkers in the Freirean sense. Most significantly, as they learned to teach their students, Sarah and Brian also taught each other, “mediated by the world” (Freire, 1990, p. 80).

Despite these potential benefits, our findings also point to potential missed opportunities for learning. More specifically, a critical analysis of our results left us wondering if our student teachers' enhanced conavigation and peer reflection experiences may have led to limited engagement with their local contexts. For example, Brian mentioned frequently that Sarah was able to provide him with valuable feedback on his teaching and “was the only person that had all that insight.” This leaves us wondering if Brian and Sarah's paired teaching format may have left them overdependent on one another and less likely to search out feedback and professional opinions from other, local insiders. We are left to wonder, in the absence of interaction between the pair and their mentor and other teachers in the school, whether their experiences teaching in an international setting were limited in scope. Could this paired placement be another, albeit different, case of “confined student teaching”? Does paired student teaching limit opportunities for cultural immersion? Despite the positive outcomes of paired student teaching abroad in this case study, we also believe there were missed opportunities for cultural immersion.

Implications and Conclusion

This study suggests that paired student teaching may be a uniquely beneficial structure for student teaching abroad. Paired student teaching has the ability to engage student teachers in the type of collaborative work and peer reflection that are critically important as they learn to teach while far away from supportive family, friends, classmates, and professors. Paired student teaching also appears to mitigate some of the challenges related to teaching abroad. Despite these benefits, paired student teaching abroad may also work to limit engagement with local contexts. We encourage teacher educators to look carefully at their study abroad programs to determine whether paired student teaching might be a viable option

for some study abroad experiences. Though doing so is time consuming, we have found making adaptations to required course syllabi and offering virtual supervisor observations to be well worth the effort. We also encourage teacher educators to consider the qualities and dispositions that would be important for an effective pairing. For example, when considering pairs, might it be important to look for complementary strengths, for students who are open to coplanning, or for students who are naturally reflective? Alternatively, might we consider placing students in paired student teaching placements who need additional work on or support from peers in these areas? Although our study does not get at these issues—Brian and Sarah’s pairing happened naturally and without our help—their overall development and satisfaction point to the importance of a good match.

As teacher educators and researchers, much of our teaching and research focuses on issues of social justice, equity, and teacher autonomy. We feel strongly that one of our goals as teacher educators should be to push PSTs to work collaboratively to pose and solve problems related to issues of diversity and equity in education (Stairs, Donnell, & Dunn, 2011). We suggest that paired student teaching—whether internationally or domestically—may provide space for additional autonomy, while also uniquely positioning student teachers to grapple with important issues related to issues of equity. Areas for future study should include investigations into, for example, how paired student teaching placements in the United States or internationally enable peers to engage in focused study and reflection about issues of diversity, or how paired student teaching abroad in non-English-speaking contexts or non-Western contexts influences participants’ experiences and development. Longitudinal research on the teaching methods, collaboration skills, and reflective habits of educators who have previously engaged in paired student teaching abroad would also be important in demonstrating the long-term impact of this student teaching format. Finally, we suggest that future studies compare the developing pedagogical skills of solitary student teachers teaching abroad to those of paired student teachers.

We see much promise in utilizing paired student teaching abroad as a way to combat the traditional banking models of student teaching that often dominate institutions of teacher education today. The international context provides a unique setting for novice educators to discover themselves and encourage self-reflection in ways that a more familiar setting may not. The additional factor of a paired placement allowed our participants to problem-pose together and to support each other in the delicate process of transformation.

Notes

¹ All names used throughout the manuscript are pseudonyms.

² There was an existing partnership between Sarah and Brian’s university and the university in Malmo. The city offered a unique international context but, with many English

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speakers, also made it possible for students to travel abroad if they did not speak another language.

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