



Creating a “third space” in student teaching: Implications for the university supervisor’s status as outsider

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ABSTRACT

The work of teacher education during student teaching typically takes place in two distinct “spaces”: placement sites and college/university settings. The program featured in this article is structured in ways that clearly mark out those two spaces. Yet this configuration led our university supervisors, whose work primarily took place in the field, to feel like “outsiders.” To redress this concern, a third learning space was incorporated into our student teaching seminar. We suggest that “third spaces” in combination with return-to-campus courses not only mitigates the peripherality of university supervisors, but also amplifies the influence of a teacher preparation program.

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1. Introduction

University supervision of student teaching is a widely accepted practice in teacher education. As field-based teacher educators, university supervisors are uniquely positioned to help student teachers bridge the university-based content of their teacher preparation programs and the practical knowledge of teaching that emerges during student teaching. Despite this advantageous position and numerous studies that indicate student teaching as one of the most crucial moments of preservice teacher learning (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001), supervision remains an underutilized resource in teacher education (Clift & Brady, 2005; McIntyre & Byrd, 1998; Wilson, 2006).

Although the format and structure of student teaching supervision varies across teacher education programs in the United States, most would recognize two distinct “spaces” in which the

work of teacher educators often takes place during student teaching. One such space represents the schools and classrooms where supervisors meet, observe, and conference with student teachers. A second space are the college/university settings in which supervisors often work with student teachers in return-to-campus seminars and supporting courses. The teacher education work that occurs in each space during student teaching often reflects a long-standing discourse which stratifies academic from practical knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Labaree, 2004). The result is an uneasy extension of the perceived divide between the theory of the university and the real world. Evidenced in part by the significant differences in status between clinical and tenure-track faculty (Beck & Kosnik, 2002) and the ease with which supervision is relegated to those who are minimally invested in either developing or providing long term support to the programs that create their positions (Zeichner, 2005), the message conveyed by many teacher education programs is that field-based teacher education is second-rate work. As an undervalued activity, university supervision is challenging work. In addition, because of the inattention to preparation for the work of supervision (Wilson, 2006), and unstructured or limited visits with student teachers (Richardson-Koehler, 1988), university supervisors find it difficult to cultivate powerful pedagogical opportunities (Slick, 1997). Because of the visible and invisible ways in which the work of

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supervisors is demarcated, the work of field-based teacher education is often considered an aside to campus-based teacher education.

Grounded in the disconnect often found between campus and field-based teacher education during student teaching, this article describes a relatively simple but powerful teacher education program reform that sought to address this challenge. The program featured in this article is structured in ways that clearly mark out these two distinct spaces, as it features teacher education in both contexts—field supervision and a separate student teaching seminar. Both spaces have different, but complementary aims. Yet those whose work primarily took place in the field, through observations and clinical supervision, perceived themselves as “outsiders” in the two spaces that defined their work—nominally representative of the university but peripheral to the student teaching seminar, and even more clearly an occasional visitor of the student teachers in public schools. Limited contact and lack of access to both spaces of the student teaching semester led university supervisors to feel disenfranchised in their power to influence the development of their student teachers (Slick, 1998).

In an effort to increase the university supervisor’s influence in the development of student teachers, a third learning space was added in the form of a bi-weekly “breakout” session incorporated into the student teaching seminar. These breakout sessions provided university supervisors with additional time to meet with student teachers and discuss issues of theory and practice. In this article we suggest that using “breakout” sessions in combination with student teaching seminar meetings not only serves to mitigate the peripherality of university supervisors, but also serves as a powerful format that amplifies the impact of a teacher preparation program during student teaching. Drawing on hybridity theory, we argue that our breakout sessions served as “third spaces” (Bhabha, 1990), helping supervisors in our program forgo feelings of “outsider” status, and enabling the development of meaningful collaborative relationships with student teachers.

What follows is a brief sketch of “third space” and how it has been described and used in education and teacher education. Afterward, we give an account of the context and situation that gave rise to the “third space” reform in our program and discuss its benefits. We then describe ways in which this “third space” opened up new pedagogical possibilities for the work of university supervisors. Finally, encouraged by the success of breakout sessions in our teacher education program, we explore future research directions. Although the reform we detail holds the most significance within the immediate context of our teacher education program, making public how program reforms are conceived and enacted adds to the knowledge base about the practices and structures that constitute the professional preparation of teachers. Ultimately, we believe that understanding teacher education is made easier as the number of vantage points and descriptive accounts of practices and programs increase.

2. “Third space” in teacher education

In this paper, we use Bhabha’s (1990) concept of *third space* to frame the innovation our program used to bridge the student teaching seminar with field instruction. Given that individuals draw on multiple discourses to make sense of the world (Bhabha, 1994), third spaces attempt to integrate—or hybridize—competing forms of knowledge and discourse. Third spaces draw upon seemingly incommensurable practices to “enable other positions to emerge,” which in turn, generate new initiatives. In hybridizing the discourse of previously distinct spaces, third spaces attempt to put together “traces of certain meanings or discourse” giving “rise to something different, a new area of negotiation of meaning and

representation” (p. 211). In postcolonial theory, the concept of third space relates to the unresolved tensions of living “between” cultures and countries, by attending to “what it means to survive, to produce, to labor and to create, within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from, your country or your people” (Bhabha, 1994, p. xi). While the experience of living in this inbetween place is certainly problematic in real and material ways for those who have been marginalized, Bhabha contends that it can also spur the possibility of reaching beyond the center/periphery binary to reconceptualize new strategies for living that hybridize the existing options into something new. In addition to its use as a way of understanding the lived experiences of colonized peoples, third space has been a generative theory for thinking about the cross-cultural tension and opportunity for creative impulse created in a globalized world where the concepts of borders and national identity are more fluid than ever before. Bhabha argues that third space “can open the way to conceptualizing an *international culture*” by keeping in mind “that it is in the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (p. 56, original emphasis). In education research, third space theory has been harnessed for its potential to consider the experiences of *international* students who, upon the basis of their nationality, immigrant status, ethnicity and/or language, find the classroom to be an inbetween space they must learn to navigate. However, the concept of third space has also been used to think about many other places in education in which dominant and marginalized communities and discourses co-exist (English, 2005; Luk-Fong, 2010; Selby, 2004).

According to Moje et al. (2004), third space has been positioned in education research as a space in which to: (1) build bridges between marginalized discourses; (2) allow members to navigate across different discourse communities; and (3) create conversational spaces that bring competing discourses into dialogue with each other. Although recent publications in third space education research in the U.S. have included work in the fields of science (Barton & Tan, 2009; Emdin, 2009; Roth, 2008), math (Flessner, 2009), and social studies (Schillinger, 2007), the use of third space in education is often linked to the language and literacy (Cook, 2005; Fitts, 2009; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997; Moje et al., 2004). This work has highlighted the way in which educators can construct third spaces to enhance “the education of youth whose experiences have not traditionally been valued in schools” by validating home and community discourses for use within the school and classroom (Moje et al., 2004, p. 48). In teacher education, third space theory has been used to find ways to create opportunities to bring together practitioner and academic knowledge in new ways. In particular, Zeichner (2010) cites examples of teacher education programs that attempt to create hybrid spaces by bringing P-12 teachers into campus-based courses and integrating their knowledge or representation of their knowledge into the professional preparation of teachers. Zeichner also sees programs that utilize the expertise in the communities in which schools are situated as creating important third spaces for teacher learning.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), although drawing from a different theoretical background, envision spaces in teacher education that can help reconceptualize the binary between the theoretical and practical knowledge needed for teaching. Such spaces emerge when practitioners in learning communities make problematic their own knowledge and practice as well as the knowledge and practice of others. Creating these third cultures is based on the premise that inquiry into the relationship between academic and practical knowledge are key in interrupting the

hierarchy often found within these discourses. Through inquiry, these spaces foster opportunities where “practice is more than practical, inquiry is more than an artful rendering of teachers’ practical knowledge, and understanding the knowledge needs of teaching means transcending the idea that the formal-practical distinction captures the universe of knowledge types” (p. 274).

As research suggests, teacher education programs are often complicit in dividing the professional education of teachers into two seemingly unrelated parts – academic and practical (Bickmore, Smagorinsky, & O’Donnell-Allen, 2005; Britzman, 2003). During the student teaching experience, this dichotomy is further reified, leading student teachers to lament the inadequacy of their preparation, and consequently, position the field experience as a more productive learning environment (Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, 2008). Though limiting, this dichotomy also signals opportunity. Bhabha (1994) argues that, “Learning to work with contradictory strains of languages *lived*, and languages *learned*, has the potential for a remarkable critical and creative impulse” (p. x). Our use of third space in this article focuses on the construction of a space in our teacher education program that tried to pull together the contradictions of the students *lived* practical knowledge and the *learned* academic discourse, in a creative way. With campus and field-based components of student teaching clearly delimited in our program, the third space of the breakout session was intended to blur these binary spaces.

Limited by the constraints of field instruction (e.g., negotiating complex hierarchical relationships, limited time for field visits, lack of relationships with student teachers), and the impermeability of the campus-based seminar space, we sought to create a third space where our university supervisors were able to help student teachers navigate and cross between two differently positioned discourse communities. Although traces of the discourse from both of those spaces would always be present, it was our belief that bringing these binaries into conversation would open up new ways of knowing for our student teachers. Furthermore, by attempting to collapse dichotomous ways of thinking about learning to teach, field instructors were inhabiting a new position in relationships with student teachers as well as within our teacher education program. In creating this third space, we sought to complicate the boundaries that set academic knowledge apart from practitioner knowledge in teacher education, for student teachers and field-based teacher educators alike.

3. Context

3.1. Losing a field visit

Our teacher education program is situated at a large, publicly funded research university in the United States, and is subject to the resources and constraints of state budgets. During Fall 2008, a state budget crisis prompted a series of cost saving measures. Most pertinent to our work as teacher educators was the decision to curtail the number of school visits by university supervisors from four to three. Like many programs around the U.S., our student teachers receive university-sponsored support during their field experience by university supervisors, called “field instructors” in this program. Traditionally, the main component of field instruction is a series of classroom/school observation visits spaced evenly across the twelve-week student teaching field experience. In response to declining financial resources, college administrators decided to save costs by financially reimbursing the mileage expense of field instructors for three, rather than four visits. Field instructors received the same compensation for their work, but the University would realize a savings from reduced mileage reimbursements.

With the loss of a field visit, it quickly became apparent that the complicated work of field instruction became more difficult. Even before the mandate to reduce visits, many field instructors felt that four visits provided barely enough time to cultivate a relationship and develop a working knowledge of how to help student teachers develop within their own situated experiences. Given the variety of hierarchical relationships and situational differences each student teaching placement requires field instructors to negotiate (McIntyre & Byrd, 1998; Slick, 1998; Veal & Rikard, 1998), time is a valuable commodity. Additionally, because our program essentially kept university supervisors out of the accompanying return-to-campus weekly student teacher seminar experience, losing a visit not only restricted our already limited time with student teachers, but also further disenfranchised us from influencing preservice teacher development.

3.2. Social studies teacher educator community

Serving as a platform to voice these frustrations was a teacher education community of practice that brought together both faculty and graduate teaching assistants who taught courses and supervised field experiences in the secondary social studies teacher preparation program. The broad aim of this space was to facilitate collaborative inquiry into the work of social studies teacher education. In the academic term featured in this research, there were nine participants with varying teacher education experience in the group: five graduate teaching assistants, two-tenure-track faculty, one clinical faculty, and one academic professional who worked with our social studies teacher education program. All of the graduate assistants were enrolled in the social studies education doctoral program, a program in which each had accumulated from one to four years of experience (see Table 1). Although these differences in experience could have created an environment where the more experienced transmitted their knowledge about teacher education to the less experienced, our focus on collaboratively inquiring about our work as teacher educators blurred many of these hierarchical divisions. In working alongside others with similar experiences, our struggles and ongoing learning were made “visible and accessible to others and thus offered our own learning as a grist for the learning of others” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 13). Despite differences in experience, the seminar positioned members of our group to share reciprocally in the responsibility of developing as teacher educators.

Table 1
Teacher education community participants.

| Teacher educators | Position in program | Spring 2009 assignment |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Graduate students</i> | | |
| Alex | Third year doctoral student | University & field-based instruction |
| Mardi Joseph | First year doctoral student Fourth year doctoral student | Field-based instruction University & field-based instruction |
| Brandon | Fourth year doctoral student | University & field-based instruction |
| Daniel | Fourth year doctoral student | University & field-based instruction |
| <i>Faculty/staff</i> | | |
| Hilary | Tenure-track assistant professor | University-based instruction |
| Todd | Tenured associate professor and program coordinator | University-based instruction |
| Lew | Clinical faculty | University & field-based instruction |
| Nicole | Academic professional | Academic advising |

3.3. Responding to external mandate in community

As the conversations in our teacher educator community focused on how to redress the loss of a field visit, we quickly turned to the current structure of the student teaching experience. One practical solution that emerged from our discussion to address the “outsider” status many field instructors felt toward the student teaching seminar and decrease in observations was to carve out time from the return-to-campus seminar and create field instructor “breakout” sessions. Initially, we had nothing more concrete in mind than a vision of the breakout session as a space where student teachers assigned to each field instructor would come together to continue the dialogue about theory and practice often limited by the logistics of field visits (e.g., student teachers’ limited time, complex hierarchical relationships within the student teaching triad). Harnessing both the power of collaboration and field instructors’ knowledge of the situated context of each of student teacher’s experience, breakout sessions were intended to forge deeper relationships with and among student teachers and consequently amplify the developmental influence of field instructors.

After several discussions about the frequency, length, expectations, and structure of the breakout session, we agreed to implement this simple, yet seemingly powerful reform of our student teaching experience. Logistically, each “breakout” session would occur on a bi-weekly basis during the initial fifty minutes of the weekly three-hour student teaching seminar, with the structure of each session up to field instructors depending on the needs and situational contexts of their student teachers. Although we collectively discussed what might be possible with field instructor breakout sessions, individual field instructors were empowered to decide how to structure and focus breakout sessions.

4. Data sources & analysis

To gain insight into the impact of breakout session for our field instructors, five of the nine teacher educator community participants (the authors of this paper) looked back at our conversations in the Spring 2009 meetings of our teacher education group, the first semester we implemented this reform. We transcribed these six three-hour meetings, collected notes taken during these meetings and reviewed the follow-up conversations recorded in the seminar’s online discussion forum (WebCT). The format for the three-hour seminar generally followed the same structure. Seminar members would “check-in” with reports from their respective spheres of practice in the program, and conversations would develop somewhat organically from particular topics, issues, or questions made visible by these glimpses into practice. As instructor of record for the course, Todd served as the moderator for the seminar discussions that proceeded in a mostly unstructured fashion based on ideas that captured the interest of the group on a particular day. Although discussions in our teacher educator community touched on a wide variety of issues related to our practice, some of the conversations over the course of the semester focused on the breakout sessions.

Qualitative data analysis strategies were employed to analyze the data. We began by conducting readings of the transcripts and accompanying documents. From these initial readings, we isolated segments of the data in which breakout sections were referenced. We found that most of these references occurred in the first three of the six meetings of the semester in the form of anecdotes about discussions or activities that occurred in the breakout sessions and insights about the effects of the breakout sessions on the experience of being a field instructor. After we had identified every reference to breakout sessions in the data, we began the process of

coding these segments. The first rounds of data coding focused on creating codes which could capture both the tacit assumptions and explicit beliefs the participants expressed as well as the activities and actions they described. This initial list of codes helped crystallize our experiences and the significance of break sessions. Connections were then made among this initial code list through focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). We sifted through our initial code list in order to make decisions about which codes made the most analytic sense. The focused coding cycles helped us to check our preconceptions about breakout sessions as practitioner researchers and allowed us to remain open and skeptical to the codes we were creating (Table 2). For example, our initial coding led us to label several data segments as “problems of practice.” However, as we discussed this code, we realized that the data to which it had been applied reflected more complex and dense concepts than could be adequately captured by it. Therefore, we returned to the data and looked at the implicit issues underlying the data segments coded “problems of practice” and expanded our codes to reflect the more specific issues of lack of relationships, time constraints, and inexperience. These focused codes expressed our data more incisively and completely.

After we conducted several rounds of questioning and expanding codes, we then explored our focused codes for repeating themes. Using an inductive approach to analysis, which Patton (2002) describes as “immersion in the details and the specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships” (p. 41), we looked for coherence across the focused themes. We grouped our focused codes into three categories that reflected the patterns of sense-making we used to describe our experiences as participants (Table 3). For example, one focused code that emerged from the “problems of practice” initial code was “need for new skills in breakout sessions.” This code was grouped

Table 2
Sample initial and focused codes.

| Sample initial codes | Sample focused codes |
|--|---|
| Value for student teachers | New possibilities to discuss what it means to be a teacher |
| Tensions with breakout sessions | Failures to plan properly as a teacher educator |
| Pedagogies/pedagogical strategies | Questions of structure and relationship to seminar |
| Problems of practice | Awareness of previously hidden facets of student teaching |
| Assuming different roles | More recognition of the life of a student teacher |
| Self-efficacy as supervisors | Breakout session as a problem solving space |
| Nuanced understandings of student teachers | Different insights about the problems student teachers face |
| Preservice teacher learning | Situating student teachers in a different context |
| | Different pedagogical possibilities for the work of supervision |
| | Breakout session as a productive conversational space |
| | Continuing conversations versus occasional conversations |
| | Need to develop more relationships with student teachers |
| | New contexts to draw on as field-based pedagogues |
| | Greater understandings of student teacher personalities |
| | Transferability of conversations across contexts |
| | University supervisor as more of a resource |
| | Feeling more comfortable with student teachers as people |
| | Intimidated by initial forays into practice of teacher education |
| | Breakout session calls for new skills as a pedagogue of teacher education |
| | Importance of more time with student teachers |
| | Difficulties in orchestrating multiple experiences in breakout session |

Table 3
Conceptual categories with sample of focused repeating themes.

| Conceptual category | Repeating themes |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Cultivating deeper relationships | Situating student teachers in a different context Developing new emotional understandings More recognition of the life of a student teacher Greater understandings of student teacher personalities Feeling more comfortable with student teachers as people |
| Refined focus for field observations | Different insights about the problems student teachers face Breakout session calls for new skills as a field-based teacher education Different pedagogical possibilities for the work of supervision Transferability of conversations across contexts |
| Accessing new kinds of conversations | New possibilities to discuss what it means to be a teacher Breakout session as a different conversational space New contexts to draw on as field-based pedagogues University supervisor as more of a resource Breakout session as a problem solving space Continuing conversations versus occasional conversations |

with other codes, including “different insights” “new pedagogical possibilities, and “transferability of conversations,” in our analysis because these codes and their accompanying data were making visible the fact that breakout sessions were helping field instructors have a more refined focus during our field observations. In allowing the patterns and relationships to emerge from our data source through inductive practices and then turning to theory to help us understand it, the insights of our analysis are grounded in the texts our community produced.

5. Findings

Our data analysis reveals three major benefits of breakout sessions to our field instructors: (1) accessing new kinds of conversations; (2) providing a more refined focus for observation visits; and (3) cultivating deeper relationships. Given the disenfranchisement we faced after losing a field visit, each of these findings represent a stark difference in what was possible with our supervisory practices after the addition of a breakout session. As we illustrate below, the breakout sessions gave us a greater stake in the development of student teachers by providing a space where we were able to bring together the discourses from university and field-based teacher education. Because the breakout sessions opened up new pedagogical possibilities to discuss and cultivate learning to teach, the findings we present ultimately evidence the existence of a new, unique space in our teacher education program.

5.1. Access to new conversations

Breakout sessions became an intimate space for student teachers to discuss and exchange ideas with each other, leveraging the practical knowledge emerging from each of their student teaching experiences. Because the larger seminars had a total enrollment of 23 and 25 student teachers each, it was sometimes difficult for each participant to have the opportunity to share in seminar what they were encountering in their student teaching experience. However, in the breakout session there was more time and space for each student to participate fully. Because field instructors organized breakout sessions, each group had as few as three students, but no more than 10. As Brandon said, “They get to talk about their problems in a small comfortable setting that’s not

dominated by 24 other individuals, it’s just them” (1.30.09). Mardi noted that the breakout session seemed to fulfill a student teacher need, noting that even in the first breakout session, there was a:

sense of community, and I wasn’t expecting – I thought they would be a little bit more reserved because a lot of them don’t know each other, but they just kind of jumped right in and it seemed to be really something they wanted to talk about, they seemed really anxious to talk about it (1.16.09).

By providing spaces in which there was an opportunity for each student teacher to “have the floor”, the breakout session gave the student teachers the opportunity to talk to each other. Brandon echoed our program goal of encouraging student teachers to collaborate in community when he stated, “If we’re talking about building communities, [the breakout session] allows them to confide in one another” (1.30.09).

Over the course of the semester, several of the field instructors shared anecdotes about specific conversations that became available through the breakout sessions. Daniel described a breakout session in which some of the students were detailing the number of special education students they had in their classroom as if claiming “stripes” on their teaching “uniform”. He noted, “Fortunately, we were able to use that as an opportunity to talk about what it means to teach students who maybe had been labeled with some sort of diagnosis, and how that affects your approach towards them” (1.30.09). In another conversation, Joseph told us about a breakout session in which one of the student teachers described a problem that was really bothering him and the way in which the other students teachers helped this student to see that he was not alone:

we spent a good chunk of the breakout session just talking about this problem he was having and I think he left there feeling a lot better, just emotionally feeling a lot better that he just had a chance for a small group of people willing to listen to what he had to say. Nobody was telling him – we were asking him why... I think that was really helpful for him to realize “I’m not the only one who struggles” (1.16.09).

Early in the semester, Todd predicted that the breakout sessions would, “give your student teachers space to talk about their experiences” (1.30.09) and as these examples indicate, the field instructors felt that the size and context of the breakout sessions resulted in access to new and meaningful conversations.

The discussions student teachers had with each other in this third space provided the field instructors with access to another dimension through which to understand and know them, and to anticipate their needs during the next observation. For example, in one conversation about the breakout session held the preceding week, Alex described a reading he had assigned and said, “The point [the author] was trying to make was that the satisfaction of teaching is derived from taking an ethical stance in the classroom... [the author] outlined some of the satisfactions of teaching and some of the dissatisfactions of teaching, so that’s what we used as the spring board into our conversation.” Mardi was a participant in this session and noted that the students’ conversation on the topic enabled her to gain access to an aspect of their thinking which may have been unavailable in the field:

When Alex was working through the [dissatisfactions] side, [the student teachers] were giving each other suggestions and some of the suggestions were really good...[but] we had individual student teachers who exposed a way of thinking or looking at something that more than likely wouldn’t have come out in an observation, so because they were interacting with each other [and not us], they said things that now, even if it doesn’t come up [in our observations], we now need to take up (1.16.09).

Brandon confirmed Mardi's experience, noting "I had comments [that] would never come up in observations, would never come up in seminar...That would only happen in that construct [of the breakout session]". Alex responded, "We pull the curtain in a way during the [breakout session] where they kind of...get into these discussions about what's going on in class and why they're thinking in a certain direction" (1.16.09). By pulling the curtain on the way in which students talked to each other – a kind of talk we identified as *not* being the same kind of talk they have with field instructors on a one-on-one basis – we gained not only insight, but access, to spaces of their experience which were previously unavailable. We believe that this new space is related to Bhabha's argument that "it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative intervention into existence" (1994, p. 12). Although the field instructors were participants in these breakout session conversations, the counterproductive features of our hierarchical position, although not eliminated, were at least diminished. We were able to talk with them instead of talk to them. Through occupying this interstice, or rupture, with the student teachers, creative interventions emerged for all of us.

5.2. *Refined focus during observation visits*

Research into the discourse between university supervisors and student teachers reveals a disturbing picture—there is not much pedagogical depth in these conversations. Studies indicate that supervisors spend much of their time simply faultfinding or talking about classroom management and behavior issues (Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009; Waite, 1991; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Much of this lack of depth is due, in part to the structure of student teacher supervision. With little or no established relationship with preservice teachers in the field, many supervisors walk into placement sites blindly, and with limited visits, are often left with little choice but to perform triage during post-observation conferences (Slick, 1997). As a result, many conversations superficially focus on fixing management issues or pointing out mistakes in practice or choices.

In past conversations within our community of teacher educators, many who were supervisors stated that limited interactions with student teachers hampered their ability to assess and aid development. However, after the implementation of breakout sessions, field instructors indicated that breakout session provided supervisors with more time to unpack and address potential problems and challenges with the field experience. In a post on our teacher educator community online platform, Alex noted that the breakout session maximized his time in the field:

I had my first field visit today and had some really though provoking conversation with my student teacher. I think the breakout session had a lot to do with how this visit felt...I had an idea of the pedagogical work I needed to focus on with the student teacher and I jumped right into it during the pre and post observation (1.23.09).

Other field instructors also indicated that the breakout sessions had caused them to think differently about their pedagogy. For example, Mardi described an activity for depicting good teaching she had adapted from a course on teacher education in which she was enrolled and talked about the way she used that activity in her breakout session. The benefits of the activity were two-fold. First, asking the student teachers to draw their vision of good teaching provided a great deal of insight into the ways in which the student teachers conceived of teaching and learning: "Somebody had a drawing that had desks in rows and a chalkboard that said, 'Teach, try, apply, and test'...now I can go about things [during the observation] in a certain way, knowing that's where he's coming from"

(1.16.09). Secondly, it gave her the opportunity to examine her practice as a field instructor. She commented, "I'm already thinking about what I should have done differently [in response to the student's drawing] and how it could have been better...I should have expanded on the activity right then, and asked [the student] to connect the drawing to a rationale for teaching. But I think I can come back to that in [the student's] observation" (1.16.09).

Joseph echoed the sentiment that the breakout sessions provided opportunities to plan for observations when he described his reaction to a dilemma a student teacher brought up in a breakout session:

I actually felt really good about it, not because we solved his problem, but because I know that he's having this problem when I go out to observe him...I think it gives me insight into things that I can already look for, things that I already know that I can talk to him about. Maybe I can envision me approaching need [it] differently now that I know (1.16.09).

Later in the semester, Joseph articulated further the impact of the breakout sessions on his practice: "I think the whole environment has opened up spaces for me to question my role as a field instructor". In response to a request to clarify what was different, he said "I've developed this critical lens through which I look at my own practice, which I'm bringing to this semester...maybe I'm going through a period of growth because I'm looking at my own practice in a different way" (3.20.09) These comments indicate that field instructors saw the breakout sessions as spaces that provided new ways to access the information needed to *plan* for what the student teachers would need in an observation: this position allowed them to transcend the triage model, and instead, to approach an observation pedagogically. Additionally, this new position of being able to anticipate a student teacher's needs based open conversations that occurred during the breakout sessions prompted to the field instructors to reflect on their practice and to reconsider their approaches to the pedagogy of working with students teachers in the field.

Bhabha (1990) referred to the third space as a situation that "enables other positions to emerge" because principles must be rethought and extended (p. 216). As Alex, Mardi, and Joseph indicated, attending to comments and concerns in the breakout session required them to re-think their approach to working with their student teachers, and gave them the ability to take a position to which they would have likely not had access without the dialogue and interaction made possible in the breakout sessions. Because of this space, we approached the pedagogical work in our observations of the student teachers in a different way than we had before.

5.3. *Cultivating deeper relationships*

When we came together in our teacher educator community after the first breakout sessions and the first student teacher observations, field instructors indicated overwhelmingly that the breakout space was a positive step in the right direction. This enthusiasm was due, in large part, to the way in which the breakout sessions contributed to the development of relationships between field instructors and student teachers. With student teaching seen as a public act often resulting in feelings of uncertainty, doubt, tension, and isolation (Gratch, 2000; de Lima, 2003), we found that breakout sessions provided an opportunity for student teachers facing similar dilemmas and concerns to obtain feedback and reassurance from field instructors early in their student teaching experience.

For field instructors, the chance to meet with student teachers for an extended period of time, learning about them and their goals for the student teaching experience prior to the first observation, was perceived as valuable and preferable to the former

arrangement consisting of a single “meet your student teacher” meeting followed by a series of field observations. Research on student teaching supervision affirms the feeling expressed by our field instructors. As several scholars note, in order for the supervisor to effectively support the student teacher, an interpersonal relationship between student teacher and supervisor is crucial (Caires & Almeida, 2007; Fayne, 2007; Talvitie, Peltokallio, & Mannisto, 2000). Indeed, in some semesters the first face-to-face, meet your student teacher opportunity for field instructors was the first observation visit. For example, in the previous semester, as Mardi noted, the first observation was likely to have occurred in a context in which “I didn’t even know what these people looked like – so when they were meeting me in the school office, [I was thinking] I hope I can pick out the student teacher here because I don’t think I’ll be able to pick them out of a crowd” (1.16.09). Later in the semester, she acknowledged that because she didn’t feel that she “knew” her previous students teachers, “I wasn’t as invested in them...I didn’t really feel connected” (4.10.09). Lew pointed out how problematic the lack of a relationship between field instructor and student teacher can be and the kind of impact the relationship building in the breakout sessions could have: “I mean, if you think about it from [the student teacher] point of view, it’s basically a total stranger who comes out and watches them teach for an hour...it’s pretty hard to feel kind of warm towards somebody...So I think the fact that you have all met with them now...I think that would make a huge difference” (2.20.09).

Identifying a direct relationship between a breakout session and an observation, Joseph noted,

I think I am starting to get a sense that [the breakout session] is really productive... [One student teacher] told me today she actually felt a lot more comfortable with me being there as a field instructor after having sat through that [breakout session] conversation just the night before...having experienced my style and how I communicate with people. (1.30.09)

Alex also noted the benefit of the breakout session as a space to get to know student teachers when he said, “I am really excited about what role this is going to play in the field instruction aspect...I don’t have to spend two and a half visits trying to figure out where the student is and how we can maximize my time” (1.30.09).

Daniel reflected the consensus regarding the value of the breakout sessions when he stated,

having these meetings is a good thing, a real good thing. The more that we understand the personalities of the people that we’re dealing with the more opportunities that they have to say or write down, or express what is going on, I think the more it tells us about their situation and where they’re coming from (1.16.09).

Daniel’s reference to the value of learning more about the space the teachers are “coming from”, as well as Alex’s enthusiasm about knowing “where the student is” point to the feeling among the field instructors that the relationships the breakout sessions made possible eased the dissolution of the boundaries which had kept us at a distance from the student teachers in the past. By getting to know the student teachers, and gaining access to *their* ideas about teaching and the classroom, and conversely, giving them the opportunity to get to know us, as Joseph discussed, we were able to bridge some of the distance between our different experiences and conceptions of teaching.

In his discussion of the differences between cultures, Bhabha (1990) contended “it is actually very difficult, even impossible and counterproductive, to try and fit together different forms of culture and to pretend they can easily exist” (p. 209). In some ways,

field instructors and student teachers are positioned in different cultures. For example, field instructors inhabit an academic space and belong to the fraternity of “experienced” teachers and student teachers are working in the field and are still considered novice teachers. Pretending that these differences do not exist or are easily overcome can be counterproductive. As the data indicate, the breakout sessions provided the space for the field instructors and students teachers to learn more about where each other was “coming from” and to develop the kind of relationships that would enhance the possibility of worthwhile observation experiences.

6. Lingering tensions

Despite the sentiment that field instructor breakout sessions were a success, our conversations also revealed new problems and questions about the purpose and place of the breakout sessions. Although we initially decided to leave the format, content, and substance of each breakout session up to the discretion of individual field instructors, as Todd noted in one session, “To structure or not structure seems to be a question” (1.30.09). At the core of this dilemma was what each supervisor felt was more important, a tension which will be familiar to those charged with teaching university-based seminars that accompany field-based teaching experiences: Are such seminars more about providing opportunities for preservice teachers to share their stories and process their experiences, or are they more effective when seminar activities direct attention toward the content of an established university-based teacher education curriculum? In the end, most supervisors, as Daniel suggested, negotiated this tension by “riding the fence” (1.16.09). For example, Joseph used a challenges and difficulties question he posed during the initial breakout session to structure the conversations during the rest of the semester, but continually checked in on his student teachers’ progress. This format allowed Joseph the agency to choose between discussing a pre-determined topic or an immediate need.

A closely related tension was convergence or divergence with the student teaching seminar. Was this breakout session more powerful if it served as a space to reinforce the issues and topics of the seminar, or was it more important to attend to the situated needs of our student teachers? Even more, could breakout sessions serve as a third space to not only provide more leverage to the work of field instructors, but also to bring together the two distinct worlds (e.g. seminar and their schools) student teachers were challenged to negotiate? On one side, Alex and Joseph saw the space as an extension of their field instruction with “no commitment to the seminar” (Alex, 1.16.09). However, Mardi felt this approach was too “untethered” and Daniel argued that it was important to incorporate some of the topics and issues discussed in the seminar. Despite the different approaches each field instructor adopted, as a program innovation developed and considered in community, the third space of field instructor breakout sessions helped to surface and highlight aspects of each of our own developing pedagogies of teacher education. In this sense, our collaboration and inquiry into our own practice were generative of new pedagogies of teacher education at the same time that they provided opportunities to share and critically interrogate these pedagogies. By looking closely and together at the dilemmas of teacher education encountered in settings we created, troubled, and explored, field instruction became a productive opportunity to learn about, and not just do, teacher education.

7. Discussion

Ultimately, the breakout sessions not only improved relationships and provided access to new conversations, but also

contributed to the field instructors' development of self-efficacy as teacher educators. As Alex mentioned, he felt better about the work of teacher education because he considered himself a resource for student teachers. Comparing the previous semester with the breakout semester, he said the following:

Before, I was the guy that came in once, observed them, had a talk with them for half an hour and then left, as opposed to now where since I've got more contact and it's more regular, its more see you next Wednesday as opposed to well, see you in a month, that they see me more as a resource and that they use me more. So, as a result, my post-observation conferences have almost doubled in their time because we spend more time just talking about things. So as opposed to before...they do see me more as a resource" (2.20.09).

Similarly, Mardi found that the breakout sessions mitigated some of the resistance she felt in the past when she would just pop in and out of the student teachers' classrooms for an observation, occasions on which, she noted, "it was pretty clear that no matter what I said, there was no way I was going to engage that person in the conversation". Conversely, this semester, she saw the breakout session change the dynamic of her relationship with students and concluded, "the conversations are definitely better in my opinion" (2.20.09). These improvements in the relationships and interactions with the student teachers enabled the field instructors to feel much more positively about their work in particular, and the supervision experience as a whole. At the end of the semester, in response to Todd's inquiry about whether adding this additional responsibility was worth the time and energy it demanded of the graduate assistants, Mardi concluded, "It's definitely an additional time investment. But [breakout sessions] are so linked to making field instruction better that it is hard to see it as an extra responsibility" (5.1.09). In helping supervisors build more trusting relationships through breakout sessions, the work of supervisors, in a sense, became easier.

Concrete claims cannot be made about the impact of breakout sessions on student teacher learning or on field instructor practice. Additionally, there was some cursory evidence that these breakout sessions added some value to the student teaching experience from the perspectives of the student teachers (e.g., positive feedback and course evaluations). However, the narratives of supervisors noting the value of the breakout session are perhaps more telling. Having more time to invest in the development of student teachers led supervisors to overwhelmingly extol the advantage of this space in terms of their work as teacher educators. As Alex said after the first breakout session, "I don't know if they know what the purpose of it is, and frankly, I don't know if we know what the purpose of it is. We just know that it's better than it was before" (1.16.09). The simple fact that supervisors considered themselves closer to the "developmental process" (Alex, 1.30.09) or no longer saw themselves as "outsiders to the process of teacher learning" (Brandon, 1.30.09), speaks volumes. As Joseph proclaimed, "I think the field instructor breakout sessions are fantastic and have been really powerful...it makes me feel more committed to being a good field instructor" (3.20.09). If we believe, as literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) claims, that narrative is a reflection of reality, then the enthusiasm, focused pedagogical work, and stronger relationships supervisors talked about certainly helped to create more synergy between two previously disjoint spaces of teacher education. Considering this reality together with evidence that indicates that stronger connections between campus and field-based teacher education is significantly more influential on teacher learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Tatto, 1996), we believe the breakout sessions were a success for student teachers and supervisors

alike. Certainly breakout sessions, if nothing else, exposed us to, as Todd noted, the larger theoretical concerns of how clinical fieldwork, breakout sessions, and university coursework might be balanced (1.16.09). Navigating these tensions was another opportunity for the field instructors—all of whom were in their first years as teacher educators—to bolster their experience in dealing with the dilemmas of teacher education. In our estimation, the breakout session is an attempt to construct a third space during student teaching that is mutually beneficial for field supervisors and student teachers, leveling the dichotomous views of the knowledge needed to teach during student teaching.

8. Limits of third space work

As we have already noted, although we attempted to create a "third space" in student teaching that accomplished the goals of third spaces found in education literature (Moje et al., 2004), we are unsure of our success. If we accept Palmer's (1993) argument that any effort to achieve good teaching requires "good talk" about it, we might, at a minimum, claim limited success based on the sentiments of the perspective shared by field instructors that good talk happened in our breakout sessions. However, we are cautious of the temptation to label the breakout session—a space not exactly of the field and not exactly of the university—as a third space simply because we have added more time and a new geographic location in which our students can meet. We do not yet know enough about what student teachers learned in the breakout sessions. Just as important, we also do not yet know how the nature of such learning differed from the two regularly featured settings during student teaching (e.g. the field experience and student teaching seminar). Therefore, we question whether it is possible for us to claim with any certainty that this space is categorically distinct enough to merit the label "third space". For example, these breakout sessions were held during the course time allotted to the student teaching seminar, a course required for graduation. Additionally, our meetings were held on-campus in the offices, conference rooms and classrooms of the department. Although we have argued that these breakout sessions are "new spaces", the breakout sessions were spatially and temporally located within the space of students' academic program, not their practice context or a neutral location. Taking up Hurren's (2003) assertion that "How we know and what we know is always within a context of who we are and *where* we are." (emphasis added, p. 120), we still have more to understand about the time and space of the breakout sessions.

Another important caution in our use of third space is the difficulty in creating unique spaces that are able to hybridize binaries. Critiquing recent attempts to apply "third spaces" in education, Bruna (2009) warns against the fetishization of third space theory. In particular, she argues that third spaces are impossible to *create*. She notes that framing third spaces as something educators can create not only perpetuates authority and control, but also ignores the fact that learners must constantly integrate binaries regardless of our attempts to "create" spaces to do so. What Bruna believes is the larger point of hybridization and third space theory is whether "the nature of the confluence [of the binaries] is sanctioned by the teacher's authority and situated within his control or not" (p. 226). If, as Bhabha (1994) argues, "the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its pre-sencing*" (p. 7), we must ask ourselves whether we can claim to have created our third space, or rather, because the boundaries have always been present, the space has always been present. Perhaps, as Bruna might argue, our breakout sessions only acknowledge and sanction this space within the hierarchy. As we continue to explore the opportunities and challenges that arise in our breakout

sessions, we hope to find ways to sanction, legitimize, and understand the confluence of academic and practitioner knowledge in this space.

9. Future research directions and conclusions

Looking forward, this article serves as an initial step in understanding one particular reform of the student teaching experience – the breakout session. Although we have addressed how breakout sessions have benefited our program and student teachers by providing greater focus during field observations, strengthening relationships, and creating new avenues of conversations among supervisors and student teachers, we recognize the need to further explore our newly implemented third learning space. Given both the potential tensions and productive opportunities inherent among breakout sessions, field experiences, and the student teaching seminar, future research is needed that directly explores the effectiveness of various structures used during breakout sessions and how learning is negotiated within the space. Additionally, this article has described how university supervisors' perceived their work during breakout sessions, leaving out the voice of student teachers and how they perceive the effectiveness and purpose of the space. Therefore, research is needed that accounts for what occurs during breakout sessions and how the space potentially influences the practice of student teachers in the classroom and their learning during seminar.

Earlier, we noted that the university supervisor is often considered extraneous to the work of teacher education. However, we believe that the implementation of an additional learning space not only taps into the potential of the university/student teacher relationship, but also gives supervisors a greater stake in the community that develops to support preservice teachers in a professional preparation program. Moreover, given that this reform emerged from conversations among supervisors who care about the work of teacher education, and serve simultaneously as doctoral students, we take issue with the ambivalence regarding the role of graduate students in teacher education. As Zeichner and Paige (2008) note, "in general it can be argued that the more an institution relies on...graduate students to do the work of teacher education, the harder it is to maintain a shared vision for teacher education and a coherent and integrated curriculum" (p. 318). Although it is certainly true that graduate students' transient status can complicate visions of coherence, striving for any conceptual or structural coherence in teacher education programs seemingly falls short of the situated realities of teacher education. As Dinkelman (2010) argues, coherence depends on the pedagogies, manners of interaction, and perspectives of practice of the teacher educators who bring particular program structures to life. Because graduate students, as in our case, are often at the core of the situated work of teacher education, it is important to support and train them in continuing this work.

Our experience illustrates that bringing graduate students into the fold of teacher education, and not simply ignoring their development as teacher educators because of their transient status, seems to be a better way to achieve the enacted coherence that most directly affects the preparation of prospective teachers. Despite graduate students' temporary position within teacher education programs, the responsibility of preparing new teachers is not likely to shift to other entities in the near future. Therefore, the role of graduate students in teacher education programs is worthy of investigation. Additionally, as future faculty members in other teacher education programs who are likely to one day supervise doctoral students serving as field and campus instructors, what we glean from these experiences, however fleeting, is likely to reverberate for years to come.

The addition of a third space in our program is a seemingly minor, but powerful change to the established pattern of student teaching field experience, observation visits, and a student teaching seminar. Breakout sessions prompted some rescheduling, a greater time commitment on the part of field instructors, and serious consideration about how they should operate and what they might accomplish in the context of the surrounding program. In this sense, the addition of breakout sessions does not stand out as a revolutionary reform as much as it represents an incremental program improvement prompted by budget cuts. In a time of diminished financial resources available to support teacher education programs, the alienation felt by university supervisors may be exacerbated by cuts to travel budgets, increasing instructional loads, and institution-imposed limitations to their work. Our experience with breakout sessions is a reminder that teacher education programs are not powerless to respond to broader political and financial challenges that threaten to undercut efforts to prepare highly qualified teachers. Within programs, communities of teacher educators can create spaces for deliberation and communication resulting in ways of doing teacher education that, in turn, can create new and powerful spaces for deliberation and communication to better serve future teachers.

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