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Across Disparate Partnering Organizations

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Conceptualizing Third Spaces in University Sponsored Alternate Route Teacher Education Programs: Creating Coherence Across Disparate Partnering Organizations

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**Abstract:**

This paper highlights the challenges that arise when three organizations - a university, schools, and an affiliate organization – each with different visions, practices, and personnel partner to provide teacher education and support to beginning teachers on an alternate path to the profession. Drawing on survey and interview data, as well as programmatic tools from an existing partnership between a large mid-west university’s school of education and an affiliate alternate route organization, the paper underscores the sometimes conflicting messages beginning teachers must decipher from the university teacher education program, the partnering organization, and the school in which they are working. The paper uses hybridity theory as a basis for leveraging ‘third space’ theory as a way to conceive how to create coherence. It also suggests strategies that the partners can employ to build a third space that increases beginning teachers’ understanding of performance expectations and ability to execute them.

## VIGNETTE

John is filled with a sense of excitement as he pulls into the visitors' parking lot for the first time. For 35 years he was used to parking in the faculty parking lot, entering the large urban school building from the side entrance, and traversing the dimly lit halls until he arrived at his seventh grade mathematics classroom. However, today John walks through the main entrance of a newly constructed school located two miles from where he spent his entire career as an educator. As a recently retired teacher, John wanted to couple his passion for urban education and desire to supplement his income by applying to become a field instructor in a local school of education's program supporting alternatively certified teachers. He questions whether some of the ambitious practices the university's alternative certification program advocates will yield effective beginning teachers in urban settings, such as blending instructional coaching and teaching evaluation by field instructors. Yet, he believes his perspectives on teaching urban students coupled with his experience working in the same city and serving the same student population will be an invaluable resource for the teachers whom he supervises.

John signs into the visitors' log and checks the school map to locate Diane's classroom. Although John has never formally met Diane, he knows she is a first year teacher assigned to teach eighth grade mathematics in a school that was recently taken over by the state's department of education. As he makes his way from the office to her third floor classroom, he tries to recall his own experience as a first year teacher, and those of whom he worked with in the past, to consider all the possible scenarios he might observe. As he pulls up to room 307, John is filled with a sense of guarded optimism, but knows his experience as an urban educator is an important resource to leverage in assisting Diane's classroom practice.

John enters her classroom to see 26 students working in groups of four, some of whom are working on computers while others work on pre-made worksheets. John makes his way to the back of the classroom where a desk is prepared with a copy of Diane's lesson plan. He takes out a copy of the performance rubric the program advises him to use and begins taking extensive field notes. He finds himself tracking Diane's actions, subsequent student actions, and whether or not he would do something differently in this situation. After twenty minutes of observing and taking notes, John notices she is spending considerable amounts of time working with the groups of students on the computers. Consequently, he notices students in the groups with worksheets are off-task and talkative because Diane is spending less time working with them. John recalls how he didn't begin placing students in groups until the middle of November because his focus was on establishing the structure and routines conducive to effective group work. He checks his watch – it's September 16. He writes in his notes how he thinks Diane should gradually transition into working in groups with more explicit direction and structure before releasing her students. Circling back to the performance rubric, he plans on attending to the core practice of "explicit modeling" to help Diane efficiently manage group work.

John and Diane meet to debrief the observation immediately following the conclusion of her lesson. After a brief discussion on the noticeable strengths of her lesson, John shifts the topic of conversation to focusing on Diane's areas of growth. She felt she needed to be more deliberate about checking for students' understanding during the group work portion of her lesson. John disagreed with her assessment because he felt the lack of explicit modeling was causing her to spend considerably more time with certain groups over others. He reinforces this belief by recalling his own experience that groups work best once the structure and routines have been established and consistently practiced over time. "In my experience," he notes, "I wouldn't have done considered providing this much autonomy for students until at least two months into the school year." Diane, despite not necessarily disagreeing with John's assessment, interjects by stating how her principal advocates for less teacher driven modeling in favor of greater student autonomy. Diane mentions, "In my feedback conference last week, my principal told me to spend less time structuring the cooperative learning activity so that students could choose what they wanted to work on and at their desired pace." In this case, having students choose to work through self-paced technology-based modules to learn content is representative of her principal's desire to afford students autonomy over what and how they learn. John is unfamiliar with this kind of self-guided use of technology to acquire academic content and spends considerable time

in the conference asking questions to inform what this type of teaching entails and what she is required to plan for.

By the time he has sufficient information about the practice of using self-paced technology modules to teach academic content, only five minutes remain before the start of Diane's next period. Given his inexperience with this type of teaching and the requirements set forth by the school district, John feels he cannot provide tangible suggestions to improve her practice within the specific confines within which she is working. John mentions to Diane that he will continue learning about student-centered learning and will work towards providing targeted feedback during the next observation. Unfortunately for her, she won't see John again for two more months. As John exits the classroom, Diane, wondering what she is taking away from her conference, begins planning tomorrow's lesson using the same template she implemented today.

## **BACKGROUND**

As described in the vignette, providing clinical instruction to beginning alternate route teachers is especially complicated. In an effort to articulate these challenges, this paper highlights the tensions emanating from three separate organizations – with different visions, practices, and personnel – partnering to support beginning teachers. Although this paper offers reflections from a pre-existing partnership between a Midwestern public university's school of education and an affiliate alternate route organization established to support beginning teachers working within a multitude of schools and districts, it is hoped that the theoretical framework and overarching claims are applicable to any organizations seeking to partner in training and support of new and beginning teachers. For instance, even schools and universities that to prepare teachers on a traditional route to the profession could fall subject to conveying disparate messages about practice to interns and novices.

The paper unfolds in four distinct phases. First, the vignette is used to frame the challenges experienced by the aforementioned partnership in the context of a dyadic relationship between a university-based field instructor and beginning teacher. Next, the challenges of partnering across organizations with separate visions, practices, and personnel are operationalized. Then, overarching claims are put forth based on existing literature applicable to the context of this partnership. Finally, the paper explains how these claims could be addressed in future practice and research.

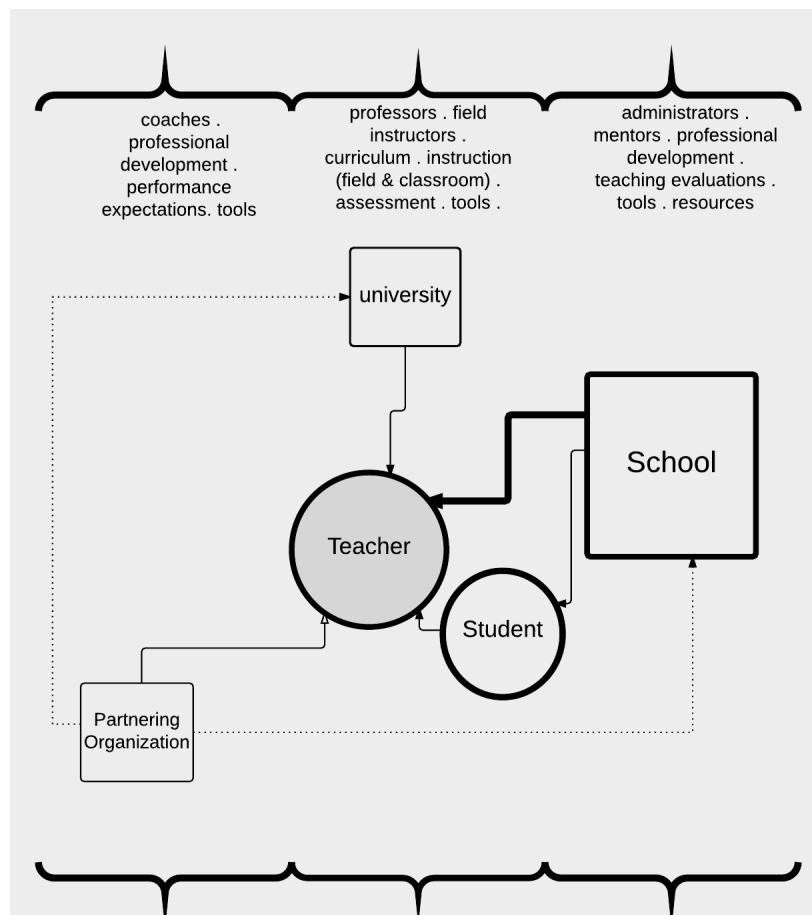
## **THE PROBLEM**

Novice alternate route teachers have to learn to do the complex work of teaching while also adapting to urban settings of which they often are not native members. To further complicate their induction experience, they also have to balance the expectations of their school or district administrators with that of the university. Often, these expectations create a chasm, leaving the sense-making up to the teacher who, as a novice with little practitioner knowledge and skill, can be left frustrated and disenfranchised from the profession.

This context of clinical instruction is made even more complex when done by partnering entities in an effort to provide ongoing support for beginning teachers in an alternate route to certification program. In particular, having multiple complex settings where learning to teach occurs creates additional barriers to providing instructional support that facilitates teacher learning. In these alternate route programs, the novice teachers' work is commonly done within three different complex settings: the school in which the teacher is employed, the alternative certification parent organization, and the certifying university or agency. In each setting, beginning teachers engage with an array of people with different histories, understandings, beliefs, and perspectives on teaching (Valencia et al., 2009).

Inevitably, when teachers receive varying messages about conceptions of good teaching and learning from different entities, their experiences in their school setting are most immediate (Zeichner & Gore, 1990) and take precedence over the curriculum of the university and priorities of other partnering agencies. Figure 1 conveys the various settings influencing the teacher, as well as the misalignment of their various resources.

**Figure 1. The competing settings of the alternate route teacher**



According to Anagostopoulos, Smith, and Basmadjian (2007), the differences in values, identities, and tools amongst the partnering entities intended to support beginning teachers often make it difficult for them to transfer theory and practices across the various settings. Consequently, contradictions across programs complicate and impede the opportunity to offer a coherent continuum of teacher development, which Tatto (1996) conceives as the degree to which central ideas about teaching and learning are shared by all teacher educators and the learning experiences are conceptually and logistically organized toward common goals.

In other words, beginning teachers in alternate route programs are asked to attend to the university's teacher education curriculum, which is often general so as to be applicable to a variety of novices across multiple settings. These teachers also must accommodate the demands of the organization or agency with whom the university and/or their school has partnered for their placement. This organization's mission may be rooted in social service or other indirect impacts through education. Then, of course, the school where the alternate route beginning teacher is placed and employed has its inputs and demands. These inputs and demands build teacher knowledge, which is a "situated knowledge made powerful by the contexts in which it is acquired and used" (Shulman, 1988, p. 37). Valencia, et al. (2009) write about this dilemma from the perspective of more traditional teacher education programs by referencing Veal and Rikard's (1998) suggestion "that two different, and shifting, hierarchical triads coexist during student teaching, often leaving student teachers in the role of mediating these relationships." This same mediation occurs in alternate route programs. Ultimately, "although all members of the triad were generally satisfied with the relationships, the university supervisors and cooperating teachers had

limited influence on student teachers' knowledge, teaching strategies, and beliefs about (Valencia et al., 2009, p. 4).” In the alternate route program that is the focus of this paper, this phenomenon surfaces as teachers demonstrating acute situational knowledge or “knowledge in action” (Shulman, 1988, p. 37) by attending first and foremost to the day-to-day needs of the children with whom they have been charged to teach. They, generally, privilege the school setting as the one to which they feel most accountable, and relegate the university’s curriculum and partnering organization’s mission to the background, especially when grappling to acquire the basic and essential skills to effectively teach in a challenging setting.

## QUESTIONS

Given the conflicts that learning to teach from partnering organizations poses to the beginning teacher, the authors seek to answer:

- (1) What are some of the primary factors that contribute to the dissonance that occurs when organizations partner to educate teachers, especially those on an alternate route to the profession?
- (2) What practices could mitigate this dissonance?
- (3) What needs to happen systemically for partnering organizations to provide a more coherent teacher education experience to those on an alternate route to the profession?

These questions are born from an immediate desire on the part of the authors to make practical improvements to the alternate route certification program that is the subject of this paper, as well as other similar programs. However, given the similar working relationships that traditional programs often have with partnering school districts in which student teaching interns are placed, the answers to these questions could also inform them of new practices to build more coherence.

## METHODS

To investigate this problem, the authors reviewed the results of an annual survey of the alternate route program participants (n=213) in which they are asked about their learning experiences in the program, particularly the effectiveness of the instruction and feedback on performance provided by their field instructors. The survey is administered annually to all program participants at two intervals – mid-year and end of year – via the program’s assessment and e-portfolio software system. It is required that participants respond to the survey to continue progressing through the assessment modules. The results of the survey are anonymized and used to provide feedback to individual instructors about their courses/field instruction, and to make short- and long-term program improvements.

Additionally, we compared the rubric tool used by the program to provide performance feedback and the evaluation tool used by the school district in which a large proportion of the program’s participants are placed.

### **A KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO THE PROBLEM: DIFFERENT PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK TOOLS AND VENUCLAR ABOUT TEACHING PRACTICE**

Education as a profession continues to grapple with the best ways to evaluate the performance of all of its teachers, including those who are pre-service. Darling Hammond (2014), in a recent review of changes in teacher evaluations calls for “a conception of teacher evaluation as a part of a *teaching and learning system* that supports continuous improvement, both for individual teachers and for the profession as a whole” (p. 5). She goes further to state, “evaluation needs to be a part of an integrated whole that promotes effectiveness during every phase of a teacher’s career. Such a system must ensure that teacher evaluation is connected to – not isolated from – preparation and induction programs, daily professional practice, and a productive instructional context” (p. 6).



Interestingly, some states have passed legislation requiring uniform evaluation scales and consequences, such as dismissal should a teacher not meet a minimal rating on the scale, or proposed merit pay bonuses for attaining the highest ratings on the continuum. For instance, the state of Michigan has adopted educator effectiveness ratings that use the terminology “ineffective, minimally effectively, effectively, and highly effective.” Though the rating system is mired in the controversy of their use for terminating teachers based on performance, the common terminology could prove helpful for orienting teachers at every stage of their career to their growth along the continuum.

However, universities and other partnering teacher education organizations partnering tend to develop their own evaluation tools, protocols, and rubrics. Sometimes, teacher education programs within the same institution will also use myriad evaluation tools. They often are intended to measure similar characteristics of a teacher’s skill and effectiveness. Yet, they differ enough in vernacular, scales, and layout that signal importance, weight, and relationship of one criterion to the other. These differences exasperate the variation in expectations for novice teachers who are left to decipher the relationship of the feedback they receive from one partner and one tool to the other.

For instance, Figure 2 is a segment of a rubric from a large, urban Midwest school district. This particular segment deals with a teacher’s actual teaching ability. Figure 2 is a similar segment from the rubric of an alternate route teacher preparation program of a large Midwest university. Both are concerned with evaluating teachers’ ability to deliver effective instruction. They both also situate successful demonstration of this aspect of teaching in direct relationship to student learning. Additionally, both rubrics reference appropriateness of learning activities, use of varied strategies, and teachers’ ability to engage students. The district references the use of higher order thinking skills as the preferred method of engagement of students. The university’s rubric, on the other hand, references teachers’ ability to effectively question, determine students’ misconceptions, and provide opportunities for students to use metacognitive and self-regulatory skills. These are not, however, specifically attributed as tools of student engagement in the university’s rubric as they are in the school district’s rubric. Specific mention is also made in both tools of how teachers address the needs of struggling learners.

That is where most similarity ends. The school district’s tool incorporates assessment, whereas the university’s rubric references feedback and reserves assessment for another segment. Also, the district’s tool specifically accounts for the use of technology, but the university’s rubric references the use of innovative strategies, it does not explicitly name these as technological. Both begin with a general or holistic description of the particular element or aspect of teaching that intends to describe it at its optimal level. However, the school district’s rubric uses terminology related to the effectiveness of teachers’ practice, whereas the university’s scale uses terminology intended to portray how routine various teaching practices have become in alternate route teachers’ instruction. Also, the district elucidates the core element for each level on the scale. The university, on the other hand, gives a general description of the level of effectiveness at each place on the continuum scale.

Imagine the alternate route teacher placed to teach in the school district using the rubric shown in Figure 2 to evaluate her performance, and who is also being prepared by the university using the rubric in Figure 3 to provide her feedback throughout the alternate route program.

**Figure 2. Rubric Sample – School District**

<b>CORE ELEMENT I. DEMONSTRATED PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS</b>
Delivery of Instruction – A teacher has effectively delivered the instruction when students exhibit that learning has taken place. Students are developing their learning through what they do and are able to produce. The highly effective teacher plans and uses different cognitive, affective, and psychomotor strategies to maximize learning and to accommodate differences in the backgrounds, learning styles, abilities, aptitudes, interests, levels of maturity, and achievement of students. A variety of teaching methodologies and techniques, e.g., lectures, demonstrations, group discussions, cooperative learning, small-group activities are used throughout the academic day. Teachers know how to engage students to utilize Higher Order thinking skills by analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating new knowledge in the learning process. Teachers design and use assessments that align with the goals and objectives of instruction and provide appropriate assignments with clear, accurate explanations, directions, and expectations. Highly effective teachers also provide opportunities for struggling students to master content

or receive small group or one-on-one instruction. The infusion of instructional technology in lesson planning to maximize student learning is apparent.			
Ineffective	Minimally Effective	Effective	Highly Effective
The learning tasks and activities, materials, resources, instructional groups and technology are poorly aligned with the instructional outcomes, or require only rote responses. The pace of the lesson is too slow or rushed. Few students are intellectually engaged or interested.	The learning tasks and activities are partially aligned with the instructional outcomes but require only minimal thinking by students, allowing most students to be passive or merely compliant. The pacing of the lesson may not provide students the time needed to be intellectually engaged.	The learning tasks and activities are aligned with the instructional outcomes and are designed to challenge student thinking, resulting in active intellectual engagement by most students with important and challenging content, and with teacher scaffolding to support that engagement. The pacing of the lesson is appropriate, providing most students the time needed to be intellectually engaged.	Virtually all students are intellectually engaged in challenging content through well-designed learning tasks and suitable scaffolding by the teacher. Learning tasks and activities are fully aligned with the instructional outcomes. In addition, there is evidence of some student initiation of inquiry, and student contributions to the exploration of important content. The pacing of the lesson provides students the time needed to intellectually engage with and reflect upon their learning, and to consolidate their understanding. Students may have some choice in how they complete tasks and may serve as resources for one another.

Again, there is enough similarity between the two that it is conceivable that across the two documents, the teacher could coalesce the feedback provided it is consistent. However, we argue that a beginning teacher should not need to do this cognitively demanding work. Also, we maintain that there is enough difference, particularly for people learning to teach and for whom the language of teaching is new, that navigating the meaning of both tools and, then, adjusting instruction in consistent ways to appease both partners could be confusing or, even, contradictory.

Evidence collected by our program via the annual survey suggests teachers perceived these seemingly similar tools as advocating for contradictory practices. Results from the survey provided to all teachers enrolled in the program (n=213) indicated teachers were, generally, dissatisfied by the conflict between what was taught and advocated by the university and what was demanded of them in their schools. In particular, teachers believed the university coursework and field instruction needed to be more closely aligned with school or district expectations. For example, one teacher noted university personnel need to have “more of an understanding of the [School District] & [Cooperative Learning Structure] and offering feedback that can work for and with this system” (Teacher Survey, December 2013). Another teacher expressed a similar sentiment by stating, “my field instructor did not really understand how to give me constructive feedback since he didn’t really seem to understand how student-centered learning works” (Teacher Survey, December 2013). In the latter case, the teacher was accustomed to a tool and school environment that mandated student-centered learning, a practice that is also advocated by the university. However, since the field instructor and teacher had different conceptions of what student centered learning entails, the teacher felt she was not receiving the assistance she needed to be more effective. This sentiment is expressed when she states, “if field instructors could understand SCL [student-centered learning] and the [School District] better, they could better support us.” The contradictory messages inherent within these tools and the core practices associated within them prevent the alternate route teacher education program from being fully responsive to the needs of the teacher.

**Figure 3. Rubric Sample – University Teacher Education Program**

<b>Enact Instruction to Meet Student Needs</b>				
<p>Teachers who achieve Program Outcome 5 enable all students to participate in the educational process and accomplish the learning objectives at high rates of success by recognizing and addressing student learning needs as they arise. These teachers regularly implement instructional strategies or interventions in response to common patterns of student thinking, and use professional judgment to adjust course for the purpose of accommodating student understanding, engagement, interests, and questions, and to better support student learning. These teachers draw from a range of strategies and resources in seeking effective approaches for students who have difficulty learning.</p>				
	<p>❶</p> <p><b>Insufficient</b> <i>There is little to no evidence that the teacher is employing the practices associated with this outcome.</i></p>	<p>❶</p> <p><b>Beginning</b> <i>The teacher is beginning to show evidence of incorporating the practices associated with this outcome into his/her instruction and/or records of practice. The observed practices are employed too ineffectively or inconsistently to successfully demonstrate the target outcome.</i></p>	<p>❷</p> <p><b>Developing</b> <i>The teacher shows evidence of regularly incorporating the practices associated with the program outcome into his/her instruction and/or records of practice. The observed practices are employed somewhat effectively; however more skillful, deliberate execution is needed to successfully demonstrate the target outcome.</i></p>	<p>❸</p> <p><b>Embedded</b> <i>There is evidence that the teacher routinely and skillfully incorporates the practices associated with this outcome into his/her instruction and/or records of practice.</i></p>
<b>5A: Modified Instruction</b>	<p>Multiple effective support strategies within the lesson enable all students to participate in the educational process and accomplish the learning objective(s) at high rates of success. Teacher constantly monitors students for cues in understanding, engagement, interest, and misconception, and uses his/her professional judgment to regularly identify and implement instructional strategies or interventions in response to common patterns of student thinking, adjusting course or making adjustments to the lesson. Teacher persists in seeking effective approaches for students who have difficulty learning, drawing from an extensive repertoire of strategies and/or soliciting resources from other sources.</p>			

<b>5A Indicators</b>	<b>Observable Practices:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher constantly monitors students' learning</li> <li>• Teacher offers extra assistance or support to students in need</li> <li>• Teacher acknowledges and directly addresses common misconceptions</li> <li>• Teacher adjusts instruction as appropriate to accommodate student misconceptions, questions, engagement, or interests</li> <li>• Teacher draws from multiple strategies and/or uses external resources to adjust instruction</li> <li>• All students are included in the educational process</li> </ul>	<b>Records of Practice:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesson plan that includes predictions of potential student misconceptions and strategies for addressing them</li> <li>• Student data demonstrating high rates of success in accomplishing the learning objective(s) of the class</li> <li>• Teacher's reflection on adjusting instruction to meet student learning needs, citing specific examples from practice</li> <li>• Strategies and resources that teacher employs in seeking and implementing approaches for students with learning difficulties</li> </ul>
<b>5B: Scaffolded Instruction</b>	<p>Teacher consistently chooses multiple and varied strategies that best match the intended learning outcome. These strategies are highly innovative, effective, and engage students in learning, and the teacher implements them with fidelity.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to use a set of metacognitive and regulatory strategies are built into the regular activity structure of the class. Students engage in self-directed, meaningful conversations and work with each other surrounding the development of their understanding of content.</p> <p>Teacher provides students with specific feedback that provides encouragement and extension. Teacher and students have conversations in which the teacher pushes students forward in their thinking. Students are consistently offered assistance and hints in order to scaffold their learning of content. Teacher provides both encouragement and affirmation to motivate students to progress in their learning.</p>	
<b>5B Indicators</b>	<b>Observable Practices:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesson includes multiple and varied strategies that match the intended learning outcome</li> <li>• Students work together surrounding the development of their understanding of content</li> <li>• Teacher provides students with frequent and specific feedback</li> <li>• Teacher offers students extensions to student thinking</li> <li>• Teacher consistently provides students with appropriate assistance in order to scaffold their learning of content</li> <li>• Teacher provides both encouragement and affirmation for students to progress their learning</li> <li>• Students have structured opportunities to reflect on their own learning</li> </ul>	<b>Records of Practice:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description, renderings, and/or samples of multiple, varied, and innovative strategies used for engaging students in achieving the learning outcome</li> <li>• Lesson plan that demonstrates scaffolding of content and strategies for offering feedback and assistance to students during the learning process</li> <li>• Specific examples of situations in which teacher has offered feedback that provided encouragement and extension of content to students</li> </ul>

### **A POSSIBLE SOLUTION: BUILDING CONTINUITY AND COHERENCE BY CREATING A THIRD SPACE**

Buchmann and Floden (1990) contemplated a balance conundrum that occurs in teacher preparation programs when organizations partner together to educate teachers when they asked:

How can different kinds of learning, located in different institutions (university, training college, workplace, and offered by different people (academics, student supervisors teachers), be made to work together in practice? In the United States, the prevailing assumption is that answers may be found in bringing together the concept of coherence with that of "program". A program that briefly exposes students to a large number of disparate ideas and practices may hardly

touch them; it runs the danger of leading to a web with so few connections among its nodes that learners cannot make connections themselves and that many parts of the web will escape attention. A program aiming to tie up all loose ends will be tightly structured; it may lead to a sturdy web that is densely entwined, yet with such a smooth boundary and filled-in texture that it admits few opportunities for making connections to new ideas or events that are unexpected. (p. 65)

One potential way different institutions can work together in practice is establishing programmatic coherence through the deliberate creation of a “third space” for the university, the partnering organization, and the placement school. Zeichner (2010) conceptualized a “third space” in the context of university-school partnerships as bringing “together school and university-based teacher educators and practitioner and academic knowledge in new ways to enhance the learning of prospective teachers” (p. 92). Third spaces reject academic and practitioner knowledge as separate in order to integrate competing discourses in an effort to create new points of view (Zeichner, 2010).

For the purposes of this paper, our rationale for deliberately constructing a third space for a university/alternate route provider, a partnering organization, and a school, begins with a focus on how hybridity theory (Bhabba, 1994; Soja, 1996) directly informs the conceptualization of “third spaces.” Individuals live within and between multiple communities and leverage multiple forms of knowledge or resources to make sense of their world (Bhabba, 1994). Hybridity theory analyzes how living between different communities can both facilitate and hinder individuals’ social and cultural practices, as well as identity development (Moje, et al. 2004). In the case of alternatively certified teachers, they live in between the professional space of their school, the academic space of the university, and the programmatic space of their partnering organization space. These spaces can work in concert, permitting the beginning teacher to draw upon multiple forms of knowledge and resources from each community to both make sense of their world and develop their professional identity as a teacher.

However, what individuals prioritize or associate within different communities or spaces likely influences the resources or knowledge they use. Moje et al. (2004) categorize different “spaces” with “first” spaces comprised of peoples’ home, community, and peer networks. “Second” spaces are the discourses individuals encounter in more formalized institutions. Privilege is often given to the individuals’ first space, whereas the second space is marginalized.

We argue alternatively certified teachers “first space” changes over time. Initially, beginning teachers apply to and are accepted into the alternative certification program. Once accepted, their professional commitments, such as learning to teach (e.g. methods courses and student teaching) are affiliated with the partnering organization. The partnering organization is whom teachers report to, whom they interact with, and whom they associate themselves with. Thus, we believe the partnering organizations’ vision, mission, and ideas about teaching largely shape who they are as a teacher.

Once teaching, however, privilege is afforded to teachers’ schools where they prioritize the funds of knowledge and resources provided within this community. This claim is largely based on teachers’ survey responses teachers over the last three years. As we indicated earlier, teachers’ preferences around what they learn and how they are supported needed to more aligned with what districts and schools expected of teachers. Thus, what teachers needed from the university and the partnering organization was certain knowledge and skills that would allow them to be successful in their specific contexts.

Given this, we assume teachers’ schools are the first space. The schools are the teachers’ employers and, therefore, the entities to which they become accountable for their performance. The schools are the places to which they report daily. The school community is the one that they engage and interact with daily. The immediacy of their students’ needs is often what is most pressing on their minds. Their supervisors’ directives and the schools’ systems and norms govern their day-to-day professional existence. Consequently, knowledge and resources provided within the “second spaces” of the partnering organization and the university are marginalized when teachers are making sense of their professional world.

Given this, Moje et al. (2004) explain that, “what is critical to our position is the sense that these spaces can be reconstructed to form a third, different or alternative, space of knowledge and discourses” (p. 41). This “third space” can be conceptualized as the integration of knowledge and discourses from different “spaces” (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996). Soja (1996) argues that the concept of third requires looking beyond the binary categories of first and second spaces in order to bring these “spaces” together to generate new forms of knowledge. In our case, this requires deliberately bringing together the school, university, and partnering organization to generate new forms of knowledge in order to best support the growth and development of beginning alternatively certified teacher.

Assuming the school, university, and partnering organization deliberately come together to establish a third space, what can they do to integrate competing discourses in an effort to create new points of view and establish programmatic coherence? When examining traditional teacher education programs designed for pre-service teachers, Grossman et al. (2008) suggest coherent programs have a number of features, including “a shared vision regarding teaching and learning, conceptual and logistical organization of coursework around those aims and goals, and courses and clinical experiences designed to support, reinforce, and reflect those shared ideas” (282). The emphasis on designing cohesive programs centers on the belief that when [student teaching] placements are consistent with a preparation program’s vision of teaching and learning, powerful learning takes place (LaBoskey & Richert, 2002; Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999). However, the question remains as to how separate organizations with different values, beliefs, and knowledge can work together to establish a coherent program. To address this issue, we now turn to a discussion of how coherence might be established between separate institutions.

To minimize the dissonance for pre-service or beginning teachers in an alternate route training program that comes from juggling the varied expectations of the school district, university, or partnering organization, these various entities must make a commitment to creating a coherent educative experience for them. In doing so they would not only have their pre-determined curricula, but mitigate conceptions of good teaching, agree on core practices, develop a responsive curriculum, and use common tools. We will now turn a discussion of why each component will benefit the development of beginning teachers.

### ***Mitigate Varying Conceptions of Good Teaching***

When analyzing traditional pre-service programs, teacher education scholars have long suggested the importance of connecting fieldwork experiences to university coursework (Grossman, Hammerness, McDonald, & Ronfeldt, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Bransford, LePage, Hammerness, & Duffy, 2005; Dewey, 1938). A prevailing belief is that fieldwork must be structured to help frame later learning while in the process of learning to teach (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). This belief emanates from the reality that field experiences are often devised without clear goals and can lack purposeful linkages to practices advocated by the university (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Consequently, if field experiences do not align with their learning from the preparation program, then novices may encounter difficulty learning new practices, testing reforms, or fully conceptualizing a vision of professional teaching (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981). For example, beginning teachers might find it difficult to apply different practices in placements that are inconsistent with the preparation program (Smagorinsky, Cook, More, Jackson, Fry, 2004). Moreover, when the conceptions of good teaching within a preparation program and a placement school contradict, beginning teachers experience socialization as more immediate and intense (Zeichner & Gore, 1990).

Therefore, it is reasonable to anticipate that the same will occur, albeit synchronously, for those trained in-service in alternate route programs. The difference is that the ‘fieldwork’ is the real classroom of the teacher who is in training. The responsibility, demands, and challenges are immediate and pressing. It could be argued, then, that it is paramount for the partnering organizations of these programs, if not all teacher education programs, to mitigate contradictory conceptions of good teaching.

### ***Agree On Core Practices***

A common theme across teachers' survey responses was university field instructors needing a stronger understanding of the systems and practices advocated by certain districts. This is likely the result of the university and partnering organization advocating for the use of certain core practices that might conflict with what certain districts require of teachers. Thus, the beginning alternatively certified teachers must synchronously prioritize the competing demands of the university/alternate route provider, the partnering organization, and the school. In turn, this disconnect detracts from beginning teachers' ability to clearly understand the expectations of the various organizations and supervisors to whom they are beholden. Therefore, in order to mitigate the need to prioritize competing demands, one teacher surveyed said the university should "[work] with [district] to find desired outcomes" (Teacher Survey, December 2013). In practice, finding desired outcomes would manifest themselves in an agreed upon set of essential core practices or skills that will be reinforced and practiced across settings. Consequently, common practices across settings will diminish the need to prioritize competing demands while clearly articulating what is expected of teachers.

### ***Develop A Responsive Curriculum***

Each partnering entity must also suspend its individual agenda to develop common goals of teacher education practices that prioritizes the developmental needs of the beginning teacher based on the immediate and ongoing demands faced in the classroom. This requires a responsive teacher education curriculum with strategic mentoring that can "come from supervisors, teacher education instructors, cooperating teachers, other veteran teachers, and even fellow candidates" (Darling-Hammond, 2005). In effect, the partnering agencies can unite to provide this concerted circle of support for the novice from a variety of sources, but it will only be effective if it addresses the immediate needs of the teacher.

### ***Use Common Tools***

Another common theme across teachers' survey responses was the need for evaluation rubrics to be adapted based on teachers' school placement. If the university or partnering organization evaluation of teaching contradicted what was expected of them in their school or district, then teachers found little value in the evaluation or feedback they received. Additionally, if teachers are evaluated on different rubrics, then the onus is placed on the beginning teachers to decipher the similarities and differences across the tools. Therefore, to mitigate these challenges, we advocate for partnering entities to agree on the use of common tools, such as a common language and evaluation instrument, to support beginning alternatively certified teachers. In doing so, they will receive feedback and coaching around common tools that address the specific needs of their school and district placement.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

What does coherent partnering for teacher education across multiple organizations require? In other words, what would it take to come to agreement on core practices, develop a responsive curriculum, and the use of common tools? The implications are best summed by Pete Senge's (1996) view of systems thinking in *The Fifth Discipline*, which outlines characteristics of learning organizations. This particular stance – that of a learning organization – is essential to create the third space, as it necessitates learning with and from each of the partners in the teacher education endeavor. First, it requires that each entity desire to be a learning organization, which means being open to change and transformation. This is not insignificant given that change within organization is often challenging to motivate and manage. Directing change across complex organizations will test each entity's commitment to the partnership endeavor, as well their commitment to really learn from one another to implement the best individual and collective new teacher preparation and support practices possible.

### ***Systems Thinking***

Senge, places emphasis on systems thinking, because it integrates the other disciplines; it is the fifth discipline and the one necessary for change in organizations. "By systems thinking,

Senge as quoted in Isaacson and Bamberg (1992, p. 42) is referring to a “body of knowledge and tools” that help us see underlying patterns and how they can be changed”.

In other words, if the partnering organizations aspire to improve the performance of the beginning teachers whom they are working together to educate and support, they must practice systems thinking – not just as separate entities, but as a united front. Applying systems thinking across a partnership and not just within a single organization essentially means looking at common complex problems and how they come about to gain insight as to how the problem might be handled differently (Senge, 1996).

The partners, unlike a single organization, bring to bear to the problem myriad points of view and tools for examining and triangulating the systems view, as well as potential tools and possible solutions for resolving the problem. This is the power and possibility of partnering. Without, however, coming together to do systems thinking, each entity is blind to the problems that the novice experiences in each other context or space, and risks further complicating and hindering the novice’s development.

### ***Shared Vision***

The first of Senge’s fifth disciplines that is essential to the creation of the third space is a shared vision: “Visions that tap into ...deeper sense of purpose have unique power to engender aspiration. The practical goal of such visions is to invite people to continuously renew their commitment...” (Senge, 2012, pg. 87). Agreeing on core practices as advocated by Grossman, et al (2005) would be one example of the embodiment of the shared vision of partnering across organizations. Even more fundamentally, creating a shared vision that prioritizes the beginning teachers whom the partnership serves as the driver for the work of the partnership would center and focus the efforts of each entity even if each has its own institutional missions.

### ***Personal Mastery***

According to Senge (1990) personal mastery is the discipline of creating a personal vision in relation to the organizational shared vision, as well as a clear, truthful picture of current reality. Doing so generates a creative tension, or a push-pull of where you are as an individual and where you want to be. Senge (1990) reminds us that if we are convinced that the vision is important then we will commit to the personal changes necessary to get there. He expounds by promoting that each individual in an organization and each organization in a partnership adopt the mindset of personal mastery, then the organization and the partnership move closer to its vision one determined individual at a time. “Schools and other organizations have a key role to play in this discipline: by setting a context where people have time to reflect on their vision, by establishing an organizational commitment to the truth wherever possible...” (Senge, 2012, p. 76).

Thinking of personal mastery in terms of partnering across disparate organizations towards coherent teacher education of beginning teachers in alternate route programs, the individuals in each of the partnering organizations would need to create personal visions related to the partnership’s shared visions about effective teaching and teacher preparation. For instance, if the partnership did create a shared vision that entailed agreement on core practices as suggested by Grossman, et al (2005) then, following Senge’s fifth discipline model, each individual within those organizations would need to create personal visions of those core practices. Teachers might envision what those core practices look like in their own teaching practice and, then, commit to personal mastery via personal professional development to become more proficient in any or all of those core practices. Principals in the partnering schools might create personal visions of how they will support their teachers’ effective enactment of the core practices through the professional development they provide or through the evaluation feedback that they give. University faculty might even create personal visions of those core practices in the courses that they teach by revising their syllabi to intentionally incorporate opportunities for practice or rehearsals.

To move towards the shared vision, each organization and its individuals would need to be honest about the current realities that they face by acknowledging, for instance, that they have not attempted one or more of the particular core practices as a part of their teaching and/or evaluation systems. They might admit that their current evaluation procedures do not explicitly



afford opportunities for feedback about a particular core practice. They might acknowledge that they will meet with resistance when they include it unless they hold prior discussion with union officials. University instructors' acknowledgement of current reality might reveal that there is not much room in the current course syllabus to add additional content, and they may need to eliminate other content they also value to make room for the agreed upon core practices.

Personal mastery is as much about choice as it is about change (Senge, 1990). The individuals, and in our case the partnering entities, choose the actions that they want to take toward the vision to which they have become committed. This choice is an empowering step towards creating the state of being that each individual and, ultimately, each organization desires. Imagine each individual and each partnering organization making its own conscious, empowered choices toward their personal ideals, which are embedded in the collective ideals of educating and supporting its newest teachers in a coherent manner. This is not only a far cry different than each operating on their own, but also quite different than each being mandated to take certain action by an external agency or source.

### ***Mental Models***

Very simply, mental models are our images based on our deeply held beliefs of how the world around us works (Senge, 1990). In the case of organizations partnering for teacher education of alternate route teachers, each entity (and individual within each entity) possesses its own mental model of effective components and practices of teacher education, preparation, induction, evaluation, and ongoing professional development. According to Senge (1990), we often are not even consciously aware of our mental models. However, in the case of organizations partnering to educate teachers on an alternate route to the profession, the difference in their mental models may be detected in the variation in rubrics and other evaluative tools they employ for instruction and to provide teacher feedback.

We filter new information through our mental models, and left unchallenged, existing mental models can be extremely limiting by causing us to see what we have always seen, rendering us unchanged and lessening our learning. Organizations interested in learning, according to Senge (1990) will surface their mental models, then challenge and question them.

Given Senge's description, it's conceivable that mental models are generated by the first and second spaces, but when challenged can enhance the third space. This means that the endeavor to create a third space provides the opportunity for the teacher education partnering organizations to discuss their separate mental models about everything entailed in their partnership and negotiate a new shared mental model.

### ***Team Learning***

Senge (1990) underscores the need for people to collaborate in teams for the purpose of learning. Team learning involves a common task, is interdependent, but involves individual accountability. This notion is in keeping with the idea that learning is as much a socially shared undertaking as it is an individually constructed enterprise (Alexander and Murphy, 1998).

Professional development, particularly in educational settings where it is often conducted collectively, is a prime opportunity for team learning. As such, effective professional development, according to Alexander and Murphy (1998), is organized around collaborative problem-solving. When it is "done skillfully, it leads to the clarification of learning needs and sharing of knowledge and expertise" (Hawley, 2006, p. 121).

Organizations partnering to educate teachers could endeavor to engage in team learning that revolves around problems of practice that they co-identify and help address their learning needs as teacher educators, as well as the learning needs of the beginning teachers whom they are educating.

Also, team learning can be leveraged to remove binaries of academic and practitioner knowledge, thereby generating a third space. All three organizations are learning, so no one is positioned as the authority of knowledge - each is positioned to the partnership to *need* to learn from the other.

### ***Implications for Research***

Conceptualizing the importance and potential impact of establishing “third spaces” between universities schools of education, alternate route providers, and school districts allows us to form two hypotheses that warrant future study. First, “third spaces” established between partners have the potential to strengthen the support provided to beginning alternatively certified teachers by creating coherent learning experiences in both the field and classroom. Secondly, all partners involved in establishing a third space have the potential to collectively enhance institutional knowledge around beginning teacher support and development. Following is an explication of how each hypothesis can guide future research.

As we have alluded to in our conceptualization of third spaces, bringing together the different parties responsible for the support and development of a beginning teacher is the first step in this process. However, assuming a third space is established and a re-conceptualization of supporting beginning teachers is discussed and put into action, future research should investigate the following:

- (1) first, how did the support provided to beginning teachers change (e.g. what new tools, practices, and approaches did they develop);
- (2) second, how did the discussion around teachers’ professional practice change; and;
- (3) lastly, how have beginning teachers’ perception of the support provided to them changed, if any?
- (4)

Focusing on these questions in the future would allow us to more accurately proclaim the potential benefit of establishing third spaces on the support and development of beginning teachers.

In addition to investigating the potential benefit to teachers’ support and development, future research should determine whether establishing a third space enhances the university, the partnering organization, and the schools’ and or districts’ institutional knowledge. Questions might include:

- (1) Do the separate organizations convening in a third space developing new insights into supporting and developing beginning teachers?
- (2) How does participating in a third space impact how separate institutions partner with other partner organizations?

Further insights into these questions would offer a unique perspective into the potential impact of third spaces on how organizations partner can collaborate with external entities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Alternate route programs with multiple partnering organizations are not uniquely affected by problems of complex programmatic approaches that are often confusing and incoherent to the beginning teachers that they serve. Even traditional teacher education programs where there is a university partner who places student teaching interns in various school placement sites can be similarly affected. Novice teachers who confidently and proficiently complete their teacher preparation programs may find their induction and first years in the school/district where they find employment also wrought with messages that counter those of the institution from where they earned their teaching credential. This is likely an outgrowth of the many varied teacher certification programs across the United States. In fact, there are at least fifty different certification programs – one for each state in the union. In other words, virtually all teacher preparation programs entail a partnership of one kind or another. Each of these partnerships can benefit from attention to coherence to better serve and prepare pre-service teachers on a traditional route or in-service teachers on an alternate route.

While the debate about who and how best to prepare people to teach continues to rage, each entity who engages in the preparation of teachers has either evidence of successful practices, room for improvement, or innovations to bring to bear to the field of teacher education. As such, the potential of collaborating to learn from one another, (if not fully partnering together),

to generate greater systems thinking to create more coherent and effective preparation experiences for its newest teachers outweighs the rather territorial practice of going it alone.

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