
Finding our Place in the Third Space: The Authority of Not Knowing as *Becoming* in School-University Partnership Work

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Abstract: School-university partnerships have been a space for simultaneous renewal and teacher development for decades (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Goodlad, 1994; Teitel, 2003). As a case in point, this article takes a deeper look at how school- and university-based teacher educators experience professional growth and negotiation of partnership contexts, roles, and responsibilities. Recognizing the complexity of teacher development across the professional lifespan, and the tensions of school-university partnership work, we explore the diverse roles and positions from which we come to the work of clinical supervision and school partnership work. To highlight the varied levels of development and professional growth in these hybrid teacher education spaces, we highlight two liaison cases – Hannah, a new tenure-track faculty liaison and Sara, a veteran school-based teacher educator, who is now a district instructional coach and university liaison. As liaisons, Hannah and Sara experience self-doubt, struggle to negotiate power, and strive to sustain relationships. Grappling with finding their place in school-university partnership work, the two liaisons accept the unknown and perceive their work as a process of becoming in teacher education.

KEYWORDS: third space, positionality, clinical supervision

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved
8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional setting

Introduction

School-university partnerships have been a space for simultaneous renewal and teacher development for decades (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Goodlad, 1994; Teitel, 2003). Zeichner (2010) identified “hybrid space” in teacher education as the combining of school and university knowledge to engage in “less hierarchical ways in the service of teacher learning” (p. 89). Martin, Snow, and Torrez (2011) highlighted how identifying the hybrid nature of school-university partnership work allows for “transformative potential for teacher candidates and for school-based and university-based teacher educators” (p. 299). Considering teacher development across the professional life span, this article underscores the tensions and complexity of school-university partnership work and the importance of continued mediation of relationships. We highlight two “cases in point” in one university-school partnership context.

At Boise State University, the partnership school structure evolved from Goodlad’s (1994) work in simultaneous renewal, particularly the 20 postulates created by the Center for Educational Renewal. Two decades ago, the university focused on developing school partnerships based in symbiotic relationships, professional development schools (Darling-Hammond, 1994), and the contradictions in collaboration such partnerships may endure (Johnston, 1997). Priority on clinical faculty and the significance of initial teacher preparation has remained paramount, despite mounting critiques on educator preparation (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). In our context, liaisons are assigned by the university to work with candidates, mentor teachers, school leadership, and university colleagues. Their primary role is supporting candidate preparedness for the daily realities of teacher practice, with a focus on an inquiry stance toward teaching (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). Liaisons also participate in a community of practice for professional development (Snow, Martin, & Dismuke 2015).

The development of clinical supervisors from varied backgrounds and positions has been a priority in our context. Tenured, tenure-track, and full-time clinical faculty at the university serve as liaisons to partner schools, demonstrating the university’s commitment to teacher education. Another, more innovative, hybrid position is that of “liaison-in-residence” (LiR). A school-based classroom teacher serves as the university liaison to candidates in the building, while also fulfilling full-time teaching responsibilities. An additional university liaison is assigned to supervise the LiR’s candidates and support the work of the LiR and candidates in that building (Snow, Anderson, Cort, Dismuke, & Zenkert, 2018). The different types of liaisons in our context work in partner schools with varied commitments – a professional development school model, a consistent “partner school,” or larger schools with teachers who serve as mentors to candidates.

Aligned with John Goodlad’s work and The Center for Educational Renewal’s vision, the cases highlighted in this article dig deeper into the diverse roles and positions from which we come to clinical supervision and school partnership work and identify liaison professional growth across the professional life span. The first case results from a narrative inquiry into Hannah’s introduction to liaison work as a new tenure track faculty member. The second story comes from Sara, a former mentor teacher who was a LiR and district instructional coach. In particular, the two liaison cases identify with *postulate twenty*:

Those institutions and organizations that prepare the nation's teachers, authorize their right to teach, and employ them must fine-tune their individual and collaborative roles to support and sustain lifelong teaching careers characterized by professional growth, service, and satisfaction.

The cases stem from inquiries into how one becomes a teacher educator and were framed with a guiding question: *How do liaisons describe finding their place in the third space of supervision?*

Conceptual Framework

Simultaneous renewal has always grounded the school-university partnership work at our institution (Darling-Hammond, 1994). In particular, our teacher educators have deconstructed this work in terms of a “hybrid” or “third” space, where the varied contexts of the work influence it in complex ways at any given time (Martin, Snow, & Torrez, 2011; Guiterrez, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). We note the power of collaboration across contexts, the impact of context on professional identity, and the need to recognize the conflicting roles of evaluation and supervision in teacher education contexts.

Collaboration

A significant part of liaison work in our partnership contexts includes what Lemke (1997) identifies as “our activity, our participation, our ‘cognition’” being “codependent with the participation and activity of others” (p. 38). As Johnston (1997) notes, when dialogue is a focus of partnership work, the goal is “learning, not convincing” (p. 16). Butler and colleagues (2014) emphasize the collaborative sense of working together and identity development for critical self-awareness. As teacher educators reflected in a community of practice, we noted our different positions of power, authority, or practice, depending on the context. With this understanding, we share two cases with different institutional positions to foreground the continued complexity and understandings of Goodlad’s notion of sustaining “lifelong teaching careers characterized by professional growth, service, and satisfaction” (Goodlad, 1994).

Professional Identities

Our inquiry community, geared toward identifying varied preparation for teacher education positions, supports the idea that context plays a large role in the process of becoming a teacher educator (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Dinkelman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006; Williams, Ritter, & Bullock, 2012). Dinkelman (2011) identifies teacher educator identity as “multiple, fluid, always developing... strongly influenced by any number of relevant contexts” (p. 309).

The fluid process of becoming a teacher educator can be supported by strong school-university partnerships, while at the same time confounded by complexities of the journey from teacher to teacher educator (Butler et al. 2014; Williams et al., 2012). The cases in this study highlight the importance of working together, and feeling discomfort in not knowing together, to develop stronger professional identities.

Supervision Roles

Part of the work in becoming a teacher educator in this context specifically focused on the task of supervision. Scholars have identified the role of supervisor and the practice of supervision as observation and feedback (Burns & Badiali, 2015; Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2016). A

key tension in our roles as university liaisons was embedded in our focus on developmental supervision (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2014), while at the same time honoring our requirement for teacher evaluation (Burns & Badiali, 2015). Liaisons visit partner school sites weekly for informal observations, site-based seminars, and meetings with mentor teachers, in addition to individual “check-ins” with candidates and mentors. We also provide scores according to a performance rubric and submit final grades for each candidate. As we collaborated across contexts, developed our professional identities in this space, and honored the conflicting roles of evaluation and supervision, we also recognized the danger of conflating supervision and evaluation in clinical practice (Burns & Badiali, 2015).

Cases

In these cases, we unpack the stories of Hannah and Sara. Both participated in free response writings about their experiences and responded to specific prompts. They wrote responses describing their experience of becoming a liaison and worked within their liaison community to code their narratives with inquiry partners. These narratives became the cases shared below that were analyzed for underlying themes in the development of teacher educators as supervisors/liaisons. The two author cases were selected for this article as they emerged from different spaces, yet aligned in this context as “new” at the same time. Hannah shifted from K-12 teaching to “drive-by supervision” before entering her current role as a new tenure-track faculty liaison, who serves as a clinical supervisor in this position. Sara was a mentor teacher and a LiR prior to becoming a district instructional coach and liaison. Hannah and Sara’s acceptance of “not knowing” allowed the liaisons to appreciate their state of becoming within teacher education.

Hannah’s Story – New Faculty as Clinical Supervisor

During my master’s program, I was a full-time student and a full-time K-12 teacher. I seamlessly interacted within and across these two educational contexts – a university graduate program and a high school classroom. In a school with 99% African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, I was a white female teacher from a middle-class background, who was pursuing an advanced degree. My identity as an educator quickly shifted, perhaps broadened, with the realization that privilege and positionality are powerful in education and in society. This realization, this significant aspect of my “becoming” an educator, also impacted my decision to eventually pursue a doctoral degree and enter teacher education.

I began supervising candidates for the first time during my doctoral program. The transition from teacher/master’s student to teacher/doctoral student/clinical supervisor, blurred the lines of my, once simple, role in education. Despite working toward my PhD and having teaching experience, I felt like a novice within education all over again – not knowing so much and being confident in so little. This was amplified by my juggling of the many hats I was wearing at the time, while attempting to wear each well – high school teacher, doctoral student, researcher, clinical supervisor, university instructor. The multiple embedded responsibilities within each role meant the expectations for me were vast and varied. I was constantly mediating the complexity of who I reported to, what my tasks were, and what the expectations for my performance were.

Supervision work was just one piece of the intricate puzzle forming my professional identity, but a large piece, nonetheless. Monopolizing my time, in part because it was what meant

the most to me, supervision required, by far, the most attention and cognitive and emotional energy. A colleague and I were the lone supervisors of all secondary candidates during their internships. My role was solely evaluative, quietly wavering from one classroom to the next observing and evaluating candidates. "Drive-by supervision" had its share of drawbacks, particularly the limited interaction I had with candidates and mentor teachers. However, my duties and responsibilities within this type of supervision were clear. The power structures were long established; I formally evaluated candidates, and the mentor teachers were positioned as the facilitator of the candidate's development. My place was at the university, and the candidates knew that my presence meant evaluation and feedback.

The problem – this combination of power, authority, and lack of relationships did not serve candidates well. Once having to suggest to a candidate that teaching might not be the best route for him, I realized that I practically knew nothing about the candidate beyond his evaluations. Yet, I was a determiner of his fate? I have accepted that one reality of supervision work is supporting candidates as they determine the path that best suits them, whether that means pursuing teaching or not. However, building genuine relationships with candidates not only makes these crucial conversations more bearable for both parties, but supervisors are also positioned to more thoughtfully consider what candidates need and what is best for them, both in the short- and long-term.

Early in my career as a clinical supervisor, I learned the value of relationships, was reminded of the importance of positionality, and saw what a disservice it was to candidates to have an "absent" supervisor. These realizations have been beneficial to my current work as a new faculty member/liaison. This position requires the balancing of conducting research, teaching literacy courses, and supervising candidates. Now when someone asks me what I do, my explanation is quite lengthy. If I say, "I'm a professor in the College of Education," I feel like I'm selling myself short by not elaborating on the many roles I embody and have embodied in education in the past. Interacting within and across the university, research, and school district spaces is far from simple. Each role is meaningful and empowering, but supervision work, while the most complex, helps me feel connected to who I am and inspires my work in other facets of my job. The inspiration and fulfillment I experience from supervision work keeps me going no matter how busy, stressed, or overwhelmed I become.

Part of my balancing act involves supporting my candidates when they are also stressed and overwhelmed. Several have commented on being anxious about their professional year, often wondering, "if I will pass them." While one antecedent of learning and improving is meaningful evaluation and reflection, serving an evaluative role in the hybrid space of supervision can be tricky. As an evaluator, the ways that we portray the schools and mentor teachers that we work with, whether consciously or not, contribute to how our candidates position their mentors and themselves within the school. Positionality in these spaces feels so complex. It is more complex than working in schools as a classroom teacher or a researcher or even engaging with teachers as a teacher educator. The multiplicity of my professional identity as a liaison is extensive and complicated, and I continually question where I fit. Working in schools as a liaison positions me as a knowledgeable other, linking the candidates to their mentor teachers, to schools, and to the university. For candidates, I strive to position myself as an advocate and supporter, and for mentor teachers, a colleague and a resource. I'm oftentimes left wondering how to navigate the blurred lines of my liaison role, with the array of new and different tensions in power and authority, combined with the desire to excel at my responsibilities within and beyond supervision.

I was once told that “the more you learn, the more you realize you don’t know.” At the time, I internalized this as a reminder of the immense amount of knowledge and skill that I hadn’t yet mastered. Over time, I’ve realized continual improvement and growth means never knowing it all. I am always in a state of becoming as teacher educator. Thinking in this way helps me to reposition the angst and stress of wearing many hats as offering additional areas of expertise to strive toward and new and exciting ways to engage with teachers and students. I’m beginning to appreciate the juxtaposition of challenges and rewards each role offers and understand that learning only pushes me to learn more. I now value liaison work as a process, in which my candidates and I are changing, growing, and improving together. I try things. I reflect. I evaluate. I try different things. I’ll always be learning with them. I’ll be changing and adapting because each of them is so different. If I’m not continually learning and adapting, then what am I doing, and is it serving candidates well?

Sara’s Story – District Coach as University Liaison

From Nevada to Turkey to Idaho, I have taught for 18 years, finally settling in at a middle school in Idaho. After six years of teaching primarily 7th grade English, I was approached by my school’s PDS committee to mentor a candidate. As a veteran teacher, this intrigued me, but it also made me nervous. Being observed can be uncomfortable; it feels judgmental. I wasn’t sure if I was ready for that, but I also knew that having two teachers in my classroom would benefit the students. Thus, I agreed.

I equate my first year as a mentor teacher to my first year of teaching...trial and error, fumbling through, hoping that I left my candidate with enough tools to make her first year of teaching somewhat successful. During that first year as a mentor teacher, the thought of handing over my class was frightening to say the least. I was the one “in-charge” and responsible; if students didn’t succeed or become proficient, it reflected on me. Relinquishing my “control” was not easy. I eventually realized the importance of trusting the candidate I was mentoring. I learned that developing that trust relied on building a relationship with the candidate and repositioning my perception of “my” students to “our” students. At the time, it wasn’t apparent yet that letting go of all control within my classroom was actually unnecessary. We began using a co-teaching model, and the lead shifted between us, thus equalizing the “power” between us. I realized quickly that I was not only becoming a better teacher, but a stronger mentor teacher. My students were profiting from my mentor role as well, which made continuing to be a mentor teacher an easy decision. I also loved working with an “adult” learner, who was enthusiastic to learn, questioned my pedagogy, and helped me perfect my craft.

Mentoring also created a desire to get more involved; I was inspired to join my school’s PDS committee, become more of a lead teacher in my grade level, and eventually, become the LiR at our school. The transition from mentor teacher to LiR definitely threw me into the learning pit. As a mentor teacher, it was my job to build a relationship with and coach my candidates. As a LiR, my job became more complex and altered my authority within the school. It was not only my responsibility to coach, but to also observe, score, and grade the candidates, while acting as a connection between the mentor and the candidate, and the school district and university.

Since I remained a full-time classroom teacher at my school, the mentor teachers in whose classrooms I observed were my colleagues. The awkwardness of observing in their classrooms was painful at first, worrying if they were thinking that I was judging them. It turned out to be

difficult to walk into another's classroom and not judge if what I thought should be happening was actually happening. I remember a time when the university liaison who worked with my candidates told me that it was a pleasure and a breath of fresh air to walk into my classroom. I often wondered what she meant by that. Were everyone's classrooms not similar to mine? When I began observing candidates in various classrooms, I realized the vast contrast among teachers. This pushed me to wonder – Even if it wasn't the way I did it, did it work? Were the students at the forefront of the classroom, and were they benefiting from instruction? This questioning led to my positionality shifting in interesting ways. I pondered how to leverage my authority to be helpful, while remaining loyal to my, the school's, and the university's standards.

I became aware that my new role meant something very different from the role of a teacher or mentor. Fortunately, I was able to work closely with another university liaison. This meant that even though I was the “go to” person in the school, I could ask for advice and defer tougher situations to the university liaison as needed. Particularly during that first year, this was helpful as a new LiR because I could have her take charge sometimes. However, being the person with her “feet-on-the-ground,” I knew that I wouldn't be able to “hide” behind the scenes for long. In fact, during my second year as LiR, we had a particularly challenging group of candidates. Their mentor teachers were struggling with their lack of professionalism and the best ways to support them. Issues such as not having lesson plans completed on time, not researching enough of the content to teach the lesson, and not demonstrating motivation, were all a concern. Never having dealt with situations like this, I was grappling with how to act as the intermediary for the teachers and candidates.

It was at this point that I learned how simply building relationships, which I originally banked on, was not enough. I couldn't just be the friendly face that coaches the candidates. I needed to be a warm, yet demanding, person holding them accountable, even when things got tough. This was a struggle for me, as I previously avoided confrontation at all costs. I wanted everyone to succeed, but when those crucial conversations arose, and I had to explain that their work wasn't meeting the standards, I wanted to run away. I needed all the guidance that I could get. After practice, reading, and much direction, I stopped avoiding crucial conversations. They were still not easy, but they needed to happen for the candidates to grow into effective and confident teachers. These conversations also helped me grow as a teacher, a mentor, and a liaison. The conversations became less about the person or the relationship and more about how to achieve as a learner and create opportunities for the students.

After almost 20 years as a classroom teacher, six years as a mentor, and three years as a LiR, I decided to take on a new position as an instructional coach. This moved me out of my classroom, and out of my school, placing me in two different alternative middle schools. This also meant I would no longer be a mentor teacher or a LiR. It did mean, though, that I would be a coach to teachers at the two alternative schools. Moving into coaching teachers, not just candidates, meant redefining my positionality all over again. I also moved into the position of adjunct university liaison. Because I am no longer teaching in the building where my candidates are housed, building a relationship with both the mentors and the candidates is more critical than ever. I can no longer stand on my reputation as a teacher and mentor teacher; I must build a new working identity and be okay with the blurred nature of my roles.

By understanding that “not knowing” is part of my journey, I am learning to feel at ease with my positions as a university liaison and instructional coach. Both have somewhat similar tensions in power and authority, as I observe teachers' classrooms either coaching or evaluating.

Being in any teacher's classroom now becomes less of an issue because I am learning to accept my authority in "not knowing." That authority has set the stage for classroom observations to be a give and take between all involved, one in which each person walks away with a new realization or wonderment. This helps mediate issues when they arise, and I am learning to own my authority. Crucial conversations are more human, more empathetic. By embracing the fact that not knowing is okay, I realize my role is mostly a facilitator as I work through obstacles with others to find solutions. I offer strategies, tools, and advice, but ultimately, I guide the teacher, mentor teacher, or candidate to grow in their learning.

Discussion and Implications

Hannah and Sara, like many teacher educators, entered supervisory work with very different backgrounds and perspectives and engaged in their work in very different ways. Yet, their cases converged at the required negotiation of relationships and contexts and their descriptions of simultaneous renewal as continuous learners in their supervision work.

The complexity of the school-university partnership context was documented by the changing nature of positionality and power – as the two liaisons came to supervision work and then as they transitioned across a variety of roles within supervision work. Hannah and Sara struggled to mediate what it meant to be an outsider coming into classrooms, which made the importance of relationships evident in both cases. In Hannah's case, she felt positioned as having her place in the university, not the schools. The previous model of supervision work that she operated within also underscored the importance of relationships and presence in her work with candidates. In Sara's case as a LiR, she became an outsider in her own school. Thus, she prioritized relationships with fellow teachers and with her candidates, sharing her control as necessary across the school space. Martin, Snow, and Torrez (2011) mention that developing relationships within and among individuals and groups in schools and in the university as a way to "know and be a part of school contexts" and "becom[e] an integral part of the school culture" (p. 8). Working toward this, Hannah and Sara realized that building and sustaining relationships in ways most appropriate for the context oftentimes required the shifting of expectations and even expertise.

Each case was marked by tensions and realizations resulting from the multiplicity of identities and the multifaceted roles and authority within each. This speaks to the oftentimes ambiguous nature of the role and place of supervisors within the many contexts they engage. Clinical supervisors have been described as "guides, trouble-shooters, counselors, negotiators, consultants, and ambassadors of goodwill," all while "representing the education profession at their institutions" (Marrou, 1988, p. 19). Early in their careers, Hannah and Sara realized how their positionality in these roles impacted their work. This awareness motivated them to continually position themselves in meaningful ways and continually evaluate their positionality in each context. They were constantly defining and redefining their identities within each collaborative space, as they recognized the give and take of power and positionality within their blurred positions. The two have often felt as though they were "caught in a dance," simultaneously attempting to share responsibility within the supervision space, but at the same time own their role as decision-making authority.

As part of this dance, one tension within breaking down teacher education hierarchies was how supervision, evaluation, and the relationship between the two were defined and employed across the hybrid space. We suggest that when supervision is conflated with evaluation, candidates

suffer (Burns & Badiali, 2015). In particular, we previously mentioned the impact of positionality and relationship building. Evaluation-heavy supervision can skew positionality and deteriorate relationships. As we continue to mediate this in our supervision structure, we note the importance of working toward a shared vision across the university and the school for what supervision should look like. In our context, we prioritize developmental supervision (Glickman, et al., 2014), while at the same time meeting our requirement for teacher evaluation (Burns & Badiali, 2015). Goodlad's (1994) moral purpose for teaching and teacher education is honored, as we strive to provide individualized support for candidates, as well as urge supervisors to problematize the power differential between themselves, mentor teachers, and candidates. We challenge the "traditional triad" structure (Martin, Snow, & Torrez, 2011) and view supervision through a multi-layered collaborative lens. Recognizing the challenges associated with this structure, we wonder how the professional identities supervisors bring to supervision work impact their process of becoming. Hannah and Sara were conscious of the impact of evaluation and positionality, in part based on their previous roles with "drive-by supervision," as well as evaluating colleagues. We wonder how this consciousness might be developed in novice supervisors who do not bring experiences that make the value of relationships evident.

Despite the extensive experience in education that Hannah and Sara brought to their liaison work, the two mediated their roles as more experienced others from novice perspectives. Hannah contemplated the multiple roles she took on as a new faculty member and liaison, questioning her performance in each. Likewise, as Sara's authority shifted in her school when becoming a LiR, she questioned her efficacy in the work she was doing with her colleagues. Within these challenges, Hannah and Sara longed to understand the unknown.

Danielson (1999) described how if beginning teachers enter the classroom without acquiring all that is necessary to be a successful educator, they position themselves at fault. Similarly, Hannah and Sara erroneously felt that their success in supervision work relied on them "knowing it all." Over time, the two liaisons accepted that knowing and predicting everything was impossible; they began to view the unknown as a meaningful, inherent part of their work.

We interpret these cases as suggesting a need for attention to how supervisors are prepared to engage with candidates and other players in hybrid teacher education spaces. We argue that the professional development of teacher educators is the foundation for simultaneous renewal in institutions. As the field continues to better understand what effective supervision entails (Burns & Badiali, 2016), we wonder about the most effective ways to foster the learning of supervisors in our context and beyond (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013). Hannah and Sara's emphasis on relationship building and crucial conversations indicates supervisor development might focus on these aspects of partnership work as much as clinical supervision tools or coaching frameworks. Recognizing that "not knowing" and uncertainty are prevalent in school-university partnership contexts may also indicate the necessity for emphasizing communities of practice that focus on an inquiry stance toward teaching and teacher education (Snow-Gerono, 2005).

In sum, we encourage supervisors to embrace the journey of not knowing for the betterment of their candidates and themselves. Taking authority in not knowing, supervisors can appreciate their work as a process, as they negotiate contexts and relationships and mediate the varied levels of professional growth in hybrid teacher education spaces. Living in the third space of supervision work means wearing many hats and accepting the blurred nature of what you do and where you belong. According to Goodwin and Kosnik (2013), "Becoming a teacher educator involves more than a job title...one's professional identity as a teacher educator is constructed over time.

Developing an identity and practices in teacher education is best understood as a *process of becoming*" (p. 334). The cases of Hannah and Sara are representative of many educators engaging in supervision work who are grappling with finding their place through a process of becoming.

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