



Regular Article

Negotiating coherence through meeting spaces in practicum

Marit Ulvik*, Liv Eide, Ingrid Helleve, Edel Karin Kvam

Department of Education, University of Bergen, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Coherence
 Secondary school teacher education
 Mentoring
 Field experiences
 Third space

ABSTRACT

Teacher education takes place in two distinct cultures: schools and higher education institutions. The differences between these cultures make interaction between them challenging and often described as disconnected. There is a call for coherence. This interview study explores how meeting spaces during practicum can enhance coherence between university coursework and fieldwork in teacher education seen from the perspectives of student teachers, school-based and university-based teacher educators in Norwegian secondary school teacher education. The findings suggest that creating coherence requires meeting spaces that encourage student teachers' reflection and are characterised by mutual respect where various perspectives can complement and challenge each other.

1. Introduction

Teacher education takes place in schools and higher education institutions. Both arenas are supposed to collaborate and prepare student teachers for working as teachers as well as provide them with a basis for further professional development. However, the education has been criticised as disconnected, with a division between knowing and doing, between theory and practice (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Hammerness, 2006; Korthagen, 2011). As a result, there is, in the research literature as well as in policy documents, a call for more coherent education (Canrinus et al., 2017; Cavanna et al., 2021; European commission, 2015). Powerful teacher education programmes, prioritise integration and coherence among courses and connection between coursework and fieldwork (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Grossman et al., 2008). This study specifically focuses on coherence between coursework and fieldwork. Such coherence requires a strong connection between schools and universities, between practice and theory, and a close relationship and collaboration among involved participants (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Important dimensions of coherence are often perceived to be shared ideas or visions and a relationship between fieldwork and coursework (Grossman et al., 2008; Hammerness, 2013). What is learnt in one arena may be reinforced by the other (Cavanna et al., 2021; Grossman et al., 2008). However, rather than perceiving coherence as an achievable end state, it can be understood as a process that requires negotiation and ongoing conversation among stakeholders (Richmond et al., 2019). Then there is a need for meeting spaces where "people's ideas and practices from different communities meet, collide and merge" (Engeström, 2005, p. 46). These meeting spaces, described in the

literature as a third space, are a state of intersubjectivity in which there is a potential for extended and transformative learning (Gutiérrez, 2008).

Practicum is the pivot in teacher education around which not only stakeholders but also practice and theory meet. Consequently, practicum offers potential as a productive meeting space that may contribute to coherence. However, meetings among stakeholders and between practice and theory are often experienced as problematic (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Hart, 2020). Based on individual interviews with a triad of student teachers, school-based and university-based teacher educators (here referred to as mentors and supervisors) connected to the same teacher education institution, this study seeks to identify opportunities and challenges in respect of how meeting spaces in practicum can contribute to coherence. Coherence is understood as a process of negotiation among stakeholders (Richmond et al., 2019).

The study is motivated by the limited research on coherence and the lack of studies on fostering coherence (Cavanna et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a need to strengthen coherence between fieldwork and campus courses (Canrinus et al., 2019). To our knowledge, there is also a lack of studies that incorporate the perspectives of all three parties involved: student teachers, mentors, and supervisors, as revealed by our literature search. The current study was conducted at a university in Norway that offers integrated and postgraduate teacher education for secondary school teachers. National academic regulations emphasise the importance of coherence among courses and between courses and fieldwork (Ministry of Education, 2013, 2015). Despite this framework, Norwegian teacher education is criticised for a lack of connection between the courses on campus and what happens in practicum (Flaget,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: marit.ulvik@uib.no (M. Ulvik), liv.eide@uib.no (L. Eide), Ingrid.Helleve@uib.no (I. Helleve), Edel.Kvam@uib.no (E.K. Kvam).

2021; Hammerness, 2013). The widespread criticism of the divide between theory and practice and the international call for coherence indicate that the challenge to create coherence is not unique to Norwegian teacher education (European commission, 2015). To investigate the conditions needed for practicum to support coherence, this study poses the following research question:

How can meeting spaces in practicum contribute to coherence in teacher education?

2. Background

A challenge in creating coherence between universities and schools is that frequently they appear to be different cultures (Elstad, 2010; Korthagen, 2011; Kvernbekk, 2012; Valencia et al., 2009). Disconnection between the cultures is described as a central problem in teacher education and academic knowledge is often viewed as the authoritative source of knowledge about teaching (Zeichner, 2010). However, following Kvernbekk (2012), the perceived gap does not imply that practice and theory should be brought in alignment. The two may challenge and complement each other (Jackson, 2015). Kvernbekk (2012) argues that a version of the gap is sound. It leaves theory with a critical, independent role in relation to practice. She distinguishes between “strong” and “weak” theory. Weak theories are always embedded in preconceptions, prior beliefs, and prejudices that shape and guide practice. Strong theory may provide alternative explanations and critical views of practice. Student teachers have observed teaching for many years and enter teacher education programmes with solid images of what it means to be a teacher (Loughran, 2014). To hinder reproduction of teaching that is undesirable, a critical view on practice that strong theory may provide, can be productive. However, student teachers may struggle to recognize the value of theory as it is often perceived as overly abstract and general (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Since professional knowledge draws on theoretical as well as practical knowledge (Clarke et al., 2013; Grimen, 2008), the two inevitably need to connect. It is counterproductive when fieldwork, which involves practical knowledge, and campus courses, which focus on theoretical knowledge, are viewed as separate worlds with no meeting space where different forms of knowledge can meet and interact. The complex situations that take place in practice do not have clear-cut solutions and Heggen and Smeby (2012) have criticised those who argue for a fixed and shared vision among stakeholders in teacher education. The fact that the teaching profession is complex and that teachers have to counterbalance elements of knowledge that differ substantially should not be hidden.

Negotiating coherence involves discussions and willingness to deviate from status quo (Richmond, 2019). Furthermore, considering the complexity in teaching, it is not sufficient for student teachers to develop prescribed skills and competences (Smith, 2021). There will always be an element of improvisation in teaching (Kulelid & Engelsen, 2017). Professional teachers should learn from teaching in an ongoing way (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, teacher education should help student teachers to become lifelong learners and promote practical wisdom through experience, reflection, and discussion (Hovdenak & Wiese, 2017; Kemmis, 2010). Reflection implies a dialogic meeting with the world in which people question their own actions (Hovdenak & Wiese, 2017; Penlington, 2008).

To promote reflective dialogues in the process of creating and negotiating coherence, schools and universities need meeting spaces. Previous studies have emphasised the third space (Gutiérrez, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). A third space presupposes the notion of a first and a second space. Schools and mentors represent the first space and universities and supervisors the second. Confidence, respect, and trust are basic prerequisites for the representatives of the first and second spaces to participate in the third space. A binary between theory and practice and an either/or perspective is replaced with a both/also point of view (Zeichner, 2010; Helleve & Ulvik, 2019). This approach recognises

people’s everyday experiences and that individuals draw on diverse discourses to create meaning. According to several scholars (including Bhabha, 1994, Gutierrez, 1999 & Soja, 1996), critical thinking and the development of new knowledge can emerge in the space that is created (Engeström, 2005). Transforming knowledge is a crucial part of the third space. It helps the learner to see the connection between their own and others’ understanding of the world and creates a change in which knowledge that exists in the school and society is brought into teacher education and aligned with academic knowledge. A less hierarchical interplay between academic and practitioner knowledge will, according to Zeichner (2010), provide expanded learning opportunities for prospective teachers and better prepare them for their work as teachers.

Creating a connection between fieldwork and university coursework requires a close relationship between schools and universities (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, the interaction between the parties is characterised as complex and often problematic (Cohen et al., 2013; Hart, 2020). Several studies describe an asymmetric power relation between mentors and supervisors, leaving the student teachers in a challenging position between them (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Carlsson, 2020; Hart, 2020). A previous review study has found that mentors in school and supervisors from the university have different interests, and that practice alters between an apprenticeship and a personal growth approach. Mentors tend to focus on teaching skills, while supervisors emphasise professional development and reflection on experiences (Cohen et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the roles in the triad are often poorly defined and shifting. Thus, the members define their own roles not always in agreement with its other members (Hart, 2020). One potential explanation for the tension among the actors is suggested to be lack of mentor preparation (Cohen et al., 2013). Hart (2020) suggests to consider the selection of mentors and to define the roles and expectations of those within the triad. A Norwegian study corroborates the lack of clarity in roles and the communication problems among triad members (Klemp & Nilssen, 2017). While studies from different contexts describe a power struggle in the triad (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Carlsson, 2020; Hart, 2020), communication presupposes trust and a desire to understand and to be understood (Bullough & Draper, 2004).

One explanation for differing interests may be that the members of the triad face competing demands (Valencia et al., 2009). For student teachers, practice is a high-stake setting in which they are guests in someone else’s classroom. Mentors have to balance mentoring with their teaching responsibilities, and supervisors may find it difficult to share feedback due to the need to preserve harmony (Valencia et al., 2009).

Ben-Harush and Orland-Barak (2019) found different patterns of interaction in the triad. What tended to hinder the learning process was a dissonant interaction in which power relations between mentors and supervisors were asymmetric, there was disparity between cultures and a hierarchic division of labour. Learning dialogues require various perspectives to consider. However, they work best when the participants feel free to speak and question ideas (Penlington, 2008). Collaborating and learning from each other the participants “can come to understand teaching more richly and in more interesting ways than they can alone” (Bullough & Draper, 2004, p. 419). Consequently, negotiating coherence can be beneficial for all those involved.

2.1. The study

2.1.1. Context

The current teacher education offers a five-year integrated programme leading to a master’s degree and a one-year postgraduate programme for student teachers with a master’s degree. National regulations indicate that there should be connection and coherence between discipline studies and the professional disciplines (60 credits) including subject didactics (30 credits), pedagogy (30 credits), and practicum (no credits) (Ministry of Education, 2013, 2015). Furthermore, practicum should be mentored, preferably by mentors with

mentor education. The university provides formal mentor education (30 credits). Most student teachers have two mentors every practice period; however, the majority of these are not educated as mentors.

In the integrated programme, student teachers have short periods of practicum every autumn during the three first years of the programme. In the fourth year, they have two seven-week periods of practicum: one in the autumn term and one in the spring term. All in all, their practicum covers 100 days. In the one-year programme, the student teachers have 60 days of practicum broken down into one seven-week period during each of the two terms. Every school has a coordinator designated by the headmaster. It is the headmaster who is responsible for selecting mentors, but the administration of practice is normally delegated to the coordinator. Initially, student teachers are allowed to observe mentors, thereafter the mentors support and assess student teachers own teaching. The student teachers are either alone or in a pair in practicum. Twice during each seven-week practicum period, student teachers are visited, mentored, and assessed by supervisors from the university through what is called school-visits. A traditional school-visit consists of an observed lesson taught by a student teacher and followed up by a conversation in the mentioned triad. These rather short visits include both mentoring and assessment. Whether a student teacher pass or not their practicum is decided in collaboration between mentors and supervisors.

2.2. Participants

The study is based on interviews with five student teachers, five school-based teacher educators (mentors) and five university-based teacher educators (supervisors). To obtain a purposive sample (Creswell, 2013), we contacted individuals who represented the groups and who we thought would be able to contribute varied and informed perspectives on practicum. Although they represent the triad, there were no connections between them. Furthermore, because teacher education is spread among four faculties, we wanted representatives with diverse subject and faculty backgrounds. All the individuals contacted gave their informed consent to contribute, and the project got the required permission from our university. The interviews were conducted in late spring of 2020. Two of the students (ST1 and ST2) were in the integrated programme: one in languages, the other in natural sciences. One had finished the three short periods of practicum, the other the full 100 days. The postgraduate students (ST3, ST4, and ST5) had earned master's degrees from three different faculties and had finished their practicum. The supervisors (S1–S5) taught pedagogy or subject didactics in different faculties. Their experience in teacher education varied from a few years to more than twenty years. Some had a background as a teacher, others did not. They all had a doctoral degree. The mentors (M1–M5) had earned master's degrees and were experienced teachers and mentors. Their experience in teaching ranged from around 10 years to more than 30 years. They were all formally educated mentors, represented a variety of subjects, and were familiar with the current teacher education programmes.

3. Method

The interview guide was developed by the researchers. We asked about the purpose and organisation of practicum from the participants' point of view. Furthermore, we asked about meeting spaces, interaction among the parties and between theory and practice, about assessment, mentoring, and the quality assurance of practicum. Finally, we asked what the participants saw as challenges and strengths of the current programmes' practicum. Examples of questions asked in this study include: What meeting points are there in practicum, and how do they work? How is practice and theory connected? How is the quality of practicum secured?

The interviews were shared among all the four researchers. The fact that we are supervisors who teach pedagogy in the current programmes

demanding a careful attention on how our preunderstanding may have coloured the interviews as well as our interpretation of them (Mercer, 2007). However, our inside knowledge has made it easier to choose participants, ask follow-up questions, and interpret the answers (Fleming, 2018; Mercer, 2007). The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 min and were conducted at the participants' workplaces, in the researchers' offices, or on Zoom, depending on the participants' preferences.

The interviews were transcribed, and the analysis can be described as abductive (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). This suggests that the analysis was data-driven but without rejecting our theoretical preunderstanding. During the analysis process, we altered between theory and data in a hermeneutic way in which both perspectives were interpreted in the light of each other (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Furthermore, in accordance with Hatch (2002), we combined thematic and interpretative analysis. Therefore, the analysis was broken down into two phases. In the first phase, we searched for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). For the purpose of this study and by means of the analysis tool Nvivo 12, we first marked all excerpts of the text that related to meeting spaces/interaction and practice/theory. Thereafter, we identified themes and selected illustrative quotes. In the second phase, we conducted an interpretative analysis, which can be described as the researchers' best effort to make meaning of the data (Hatch, 2002). We then interpreted the themes more intuitively, alternating hermeneutically between part and whole and between empirical data and theory. The descriptive analysis was helpful for anchoring the interpretations in the data. In both phases we first worked individually and then together in a moderation process.

3.1. Findings

In the findings we will first address the existing, physical meetings during practicum: school-visits and meetings between student teachers and mentors. Then we address the metaphorical meeting between practice and theory, and finally the potential of third space meeting places for enhancing and negotiating coherence. The main findings suggest that school visits provide limited support for coherence, while mentor education may contribute to coherence in teacher education. It was found that the responsibility to connect practice and theory tends to lie with student teachers, but also that there is a willingness among mentors and supervisors to engage in third space meetings. In the following section, these findings will be further elaborated upon.

3.1.1. Meetings among stakeholders

The only joint meeting space for the triad is school visits during practicum. In these visits a mentor and a supervisor participate in a student teacher's lesson, followed by a brief reflective conversation involving all three parties. The conversation covers the student teacher's self-reflection on the lesson, as well as mentoring and assessment. A joint meeting that includes representatives from both the academic and the practical sides of teacher education could potentially enhance coherence.

According to our findings the supervisors as a group seem to perceive school visits as a crucial and important meeting space for connecting schools and university, as illustrated by the following quote:

For my part, practicum is an important meeting space because it is where I get in contact with schools [...] It is important not only to learn about what is going on, but also to relate to it and maybe to have some influence. (S1)

Nevertheless, disagreements can make the interaction among the involved problematic. A supervisor emphasises that it is important to have a constructive discussion and not a competition over who is right (S5).

Supervisors is the group that emphasises reflection as a means to integrate theoretical and practical forms of knowledge. However, they claim that it is often difficult to accomplish reflective conversations

during short school visits. Furthermore, one supervisor suggests that it may be difficult especially for inexperienced student teachers to teach and at the same time monitor their teaching (S1). The supervisor concludes: "I often find that my efforts fail."

Another supervisor says:

The focus is often on the start, whether it was good enough, or on classroom management... There is too much focus on assessment, less on an analytic approach [...] I don't think that I manage it properly. (S2)

Immediately after a lesson and in a high-stake situation may not provide the best conditions for a reflective dialogue and for negotiating coherence. Supervisors recognise shortcomings related to the conversations and that assessment may affect the relationship and the conversation negatively. The mentors who meet student teachers more frequently during practicum, are more relaxed when it comes to assessment. "They (the student teachers) will be assessed, but there needs to be a space for trying things out as well," one mentor explains (M2).

The mentors do not describe the visits as an important or positive meeting space but refer to them only briefly and in a more neutral way. One of them even problematises the visits:

The student teachers often describe the school visit as a visit from the outside. I find this wording interesting because it reveals how they think [...] For my part, I feel that I sit on the same side of the table as the student teacher and that the supervisor sits on the other side and is a visitor from the outside. (M5)

The quote seems to express a disconnection between school and university and a hierarchic and dissonant interaction. Two of the mentors say that they do not always feel they are treated as equal partners during school visits, even if they identify themselves as teacher educators.

Despite a perceived distance, both supervisors and mentors want more meeting spaces. The parties make suggestions for other meeting spaces, such as joint planning meetings, and that mentors should participate in teaching on campus.

The student teachers do not say very much about school visits. Some visits are perceived as positive while others are not. "It is a bit scary when there are visitors from the faculty who observe you," states one student teacher (ST5). However, when asked about meeting spaces, what student teachers mention as being crucial in practicum is their meetings with mentors. Interaction with mentors is decisive for student teachers' practicum outcome. Still, when it comes to reflective dialogues in practicum, the power relation in mentoring should be considered. One of the student teachers explains: "I tread more carefully than I would have done as a teacher [...] Just to say that you disagree politically... If you take a wrong step... Will that have an effect?" (ST2). The fact that student teachers are assessed in practicum might hinder constructive dialogue and impede efforts towards coherence in teacher education.

It is also worth noticing that mentors seem to perceive their job differently, as exemplified in the following quotes from student teachers:

I have the impression that mentors are very different [...] Some are very good at following up, others behave like they are on holiday [...] you are allowed to do whatever you want. (ST5)

I have had four different mentors. One was very good, two were good, and one should probably not have been a teacher at all. (ST3)

We had a mentor who had never been a mentor before, and he struggled to let me, and my peer take over the teaching. (ST2)

Mentors' understanding of their role and the quality of mentoring will affect their meetings with student teachers and, consequently, how such meetings can contribute to coherence.

The mentors in this study, however, emphasise the importance of

coherence between practicum and university coursework. One mentor suggests that the outcome of practicum could be even better if it were possible to draw on theory (M5). An explanation for the mentors' emphasis on coherence may be that they are educated mentors. Reflecting on experiences seems to be self-evident for them. One mentor says:

[...] Before [mentor] education, my style was to provide advice all the time. I filled the space and talked a lot [...] I have learnt to become a listener. (M5)

The mentor has changed from giving advice to listening to what the student teachers bring into the conversation and can thereby support them in their reflection and critical thinking. The mentor continues:

Before mentor education I do not think I talked about theory with the student teachers I mentored, but after the education [...], I had read some of the same texts as them and was able to discuss what happened in the classroom with these texts as a starting point. This has changed me as a mentor, and I think it is great. (M5)

The mentor describes how her understanding of mentoring changed through mentor education. Student teachers on their side, report experiencing differing levels of understanding and quality of mentoring among mentors. The educated mentors emphasise the importance of mentor education in creating a comprehensive understanding of mentoring and facilitating the connection between theory and practice.

In summary, the only physical meeting space for the triad, the school visits, does not appear to foster coherence in teacher education despite its potential. Factor such as assessment, lack of distance and limited familiarity between mentors and supervisors can hinder the interaction. As for the meetings between student teachers and mentors, the mentors' understanding of their role and the quality of mentoring will affect how such meetings can contribute to coherence. Mentor education seems to affect the mentors understanding of their role.

3.2. Meetings between theory and practice

Practicum is the space where student teachers' perception of theory encounters practice and is highly valued by student teachers. However, the student teachers seem to find that school and university are two disconnected worlds. What they learn on campus is difficult to implement or use in practice.

The following quotes illustrate student teachers' perspectives:

Explorative teaching, responsibility for one's own learning, source criticism – all the new buzzwords. They are impossible to implement, because in class you have thirty students and have to cut corners [...] It is great with ideas, but many of them do not work in practice because there are students, there are parents. (ST2)

The theory is like what we want the classroom to be [...] but then you enter the classroom, and the situation is quite different. (ST5)

The theory seems very theoretical [...] there is a lot of content and a lot of words, but you feel you cannot use it in practice. (ST4)

One way to create connection between school and campus is through the assignments provided by the university. However, the assignments do not always create connection between practice and theory. One of the supervisors says that the student teachers do their assignments for the university rather than for their own learning (S3). A mentor finds that student teachers sometimes have too many assignments (M3), and the student teachers do not always find the assignments to be relevant to practice (ST2).

In the current programme, student teachers work systematically with cases on campus; for one of their exams, they select a case from their practicum, then present the case and discuss it in the light of theory (see Ulvik et al., 2020; Helleve et al., 2021). Based on their experience with cases, one of the students says that "one should start with practice"

(ST5). Taking cases as a starting point, theory becomes more meaningful. The student teachers all agree that working with cases is a way of bringing theory and practice together. Working with cases is also suggested by mentors and supervisors.

However, being in the “real” world, student teachers seem to “drop everything from the university” (ST1). “It is difficult to think about theory when you are in the classroom,” one student teacher explains (ST5). Together with mentors, the student teachers do reflect on their experience. However, a typical quote from a student teacher is as follows: “We have reflected on some themes but have not connected to theory as far as I can remember” (ST4). The reflection seems more based on experience and own theories of practice than on “strong” theory. Student teachers struggle to connect theoretical knowledge gained at the university and practical application in the classroom.

While student teachers find that their mentors are concerned with practice rather than theory, the mentors in the study are not negative towards theory. However, the participants’ opinions concerning the content in practicum differ. The student teachers focus on doing and on mastering what happens in the classroom, the what and the how of teaching. Supervisors emphasise that practicum may concretise what is taught in the courses on campus (S1) and be a place to try out ideas from the subject didactics course (S2). Mentors, on their side, underscore the importance of being introduced to a comprehensive teaching role. One of them claims:

Practicum should contain the comprehensive teaching role [...] I think it is pulling the wool over student teachers’ eyes to let them believe that the teaching role relates only to what goes on in the classroom. (M1)

The teaching role is multifaceted, and it is challenging to provide a overall picture of it through practicum. A selection of tasks has to be prioritized. However, for mentors, practicum is not only about classrooms, but also about being a part of, and being socialised into, a professional community.

The findings show that there is a potential for practice and theory to complement each other in practicum. However, based on student teachers’ experiences, some mentors do not see the value of theory. Furthermore, coherence is a challenge when mentors and supervisors diverge over what the practical part of teacher education should comprise – without discussing the divergence.

Supervisors and mentors agree that mentor education is essential to ensuring high-quality practicum experiences for student teachers. Student teachers who may not know much about mentor education or whether their mentors have received such trainings suggest that mentors should be selected carefully. Currently, without sufficient support from mentors, student teachers face the daunting task of connecting theory and practice on their own.

3.3. Potential third space meetings

The picture so far indicates limited negotiated coherence between the courses on campus and the practicum even if there is a common goal, educating good professionals (M3). However, all the participants offered suggestions as to how the two cultures could be connected and learn from each other. Mentors and supervisors realise that potentially they can achieve more if they collaborate more. A supervisor claims that the two parties “are occupied with different tasks, but together we could be stronger” (S2), and a mentor states that “we need to share competencies” (M1). One suggestion is to “work against the opinion that we are experts when it comes to theory, [and] they are when it comes to practice. The two are intertwined” (S4). Another suggestion is for supervisors to draw on practice in the teaching on campus (S5).

“There is a kind of conflict of interest, and we risk working against each other,” states one of the supervisors (S3) and continues to say that the parties know too little about each other. “It is not dangerous to think differently,” the supervisor adds recognising the value of different

perspectives. Another supervisor claims that it is important to have constructive interaction and not a power struggle over who knows best, with the student teacher being caught in the middle (S5). As one mentor says: “You [the supervisors] provide the superstructure that we do not have time for. We are practitioners who have to translate this structure into practice” (M4). Both parties suggest a division of labour that can be productive. Sometimes it is not. A mentor describes a school visit in which she disagrees with a supervisor’s feedback to a student teacher. The mentor chooses to be passive in such situations. However, despite challenges, she embraces the idea of the third space and expresses as a wish: “We should see it as a resource to be in the same room.”

Both mentors and supervisors wish there were more meeting spaces where they could collaborate and get to know each other better. As one supervisor says: “I would like more meeting spaces – for example, a forum for discussion where mentors can meet at the university and where we can have discussions as a way of creating coherence” (S2). A mentor suggests being invited to the university and taking part in teaching on campus (M2), and another complains that there are no meeting spaces for joint planning (M3).

Mentors who attended an annual two-day conference which, due to external funding, took place for some years, emphasise how important the conference was. One of them explains:

I really loved the conference [...] that was my entry to understanding teacher education [...] We talked with people, were in groups, had discussions and were frustrated sometimes and fired up at other times and back at school we thought that it was wrong to be on different planets and think we have the answer. (M1)

At the conference, mentors and supervisors met as teacher educators, got to know each other in a formal as well as an informal way, and developed a relationship and a shared frame of reference.

The findings indicate that the current programmes face challenges in terms of facilitating coherence through collaboration between schools and universities. However, mentors and supervisors demonstrate a willingness to bridge the cultural divide between the two institutions to provide a more cohesive support for student teachers. In fact, they offer suggestions for improving the interaction and even embracing differences.

In the following sections, we will discuss both the challenges and opportunities that arise from the findings.

4. Discussion

Building negotiated coherence relies on a trusting relationship among all actors involved. School visits during practicum are in the current study the only place where the parties in the practice triad meet and interact. However, it seems to be a meeting space where participants do not feel free to speak and try out their ideas in dialogue with others which is a prerequisite for transforming and developing new knowledge (Engeström, 2005; Penlington, 2008).

The student teachers are in a high-stake situation that can be “scary” and influence their part of the conversation. Limited time and assessment pressure can obstruct a reflective conversation and consequently school visits may not foster critical thinking and professional growth (Cohen, 2013).

Mentors for their part may experience a lack of recognition from supervisors and a situation influenced by dissonance (Ben-Harush & Orland-Barak, 2019). An example of this is the educated mentor who regarded herself as a teacher educator but nevertheless withdrew when there was disagreement between a supervisor and herself. Findings support that even educated and experienced mentors do not feel recognised as equal partners by the supervisors.

Some of the supervisors find school visits useful but nevertheless sometimes find it difficult to share their ideas. While they want to enhance reflection and move from experience to abstract understanding that may have transfer value (Smith & Ulvik, 2018), the assessment

situation is often reduced to the question of how the student teacher mastered a specific lesson. Subsequently, it becomes challenging to establish connections to the university coursework and to strong theory.

Even if there is goodwill between mentors and supervisors, the relationship and thereby the interaction is far from optimal. What hinders learning can be asymmetric power relations, disparities between cultures, and a hierarchic division of labour (Ben-Harush & Orland-Barak, 2019; Hart, 2020) – and not least the assessment purpose. However, the mentors and supervisors in the study would like more collaboration and a close relationship which is described as a prerequisite for coherence between fieldwork and coursework (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The parties suggest additional and varied meeting spaces and opportunities for acquainting with one another and learning from each other's competencies. However, for that to happen, respect and trust are crucial (Helleve & Ulvik, 2019; Zeichner, 2010) - which require adequate time and space for development.

What is important for student teachers is the meetings with their mentors, in which assessment seems to play a minor role compared to school visits. Balancing support and assessment in mentoring can be hard and requires time (Bullough, 2012), but mentors who meet student teachers regularly during practicum may be able to manage this. However, based on what student teachers report, not all mentors offer mentoring that contributes to coherence. Some even create distance between fieldwork and campus courses by downgrading theory and the courses at the university. If coherence is perceived to be negotiated (Richmond, 2019), the parties do not need to agree, but they still need to respect and listen to each other.

The educated mentors in this study, find it important to promote reflection and to connect practice and theory. For them, it is not only about student teachers mastering a specific classroom, but about reflecting and developing an understanding with transfer value. Based on the findings, student teachers appear to be largely responsible for bridging the gap between fieldwork and coursework on their own. Previous studies corroborate educated mentors' perception of themselves as teacher educators (Helleve & Ulvik, 2019; Ulvik & Sunde, 2013). They have developed a language for talking about teaching, have knowledge of teacher education, and have become part of a mentor community (Ulvik & Sunde, 2013). Their expertise appears to empower them to establish coherence between practice and theory.

In line with previous studies and a recent national report (Flaget, 2021; Hammerness, 2013; Korthagen, 2011), the student teachers in this study perceive practicum and university coursework as two different worlds and consequently with limited coherence. One world has to do with mastering a classroom, the other relates to classroom ideals. The student teachers seem to find a similar attitude among mentors and suggest that theory (understood as course literature) does not have a proper place in schools. Our findings align with Darling-Hammond's (2006) argument that fieldwork in teacher education is often left to chance while university coursework is often seen as overly abstract.

While, according to student teachers, the course literature seems to describe the ideal school, practicum provides cases that include the complexity found in schools and classrooms (Helleve et al., 2021). Therefore, meaningful assignments like cases from practicum may constitute a fruitful starting point for joint reflection where perspectives "meet, collide and merge" (Engeström, 2005, p. 46).

To practise as teachers is different from reading about it. However, the impression that student teachers obtain of the profession during practicum may also be limited or conservative (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020). The varied quality of practicum reported in this study underscores the possibility that practicum may offer a picture of practice that needs to be challenged – for example, by the courses at university and strong theory (Kvernbekk, 2012). Being a professional is not only about fitting into the existing culture and reproduce the status quo (Grudnoff, 2012).

Furthermore, there seems to be some disagreement concerning what practicum should include. Some supervisors and the student teachers

emphasise the teaching of subject matter, while mentors emphasise the importance of the comprehensive teaching role. If practicum and campus courses present different teaching roles, coherence may be threatened if the difference is not thematised and discussed among the involved.

Schools and universities represent different cultures that can challenge and complement each other and mutually provide a richer understanding of the teaching profession (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Jackson, 2015). This can occur despite their disparities, yet there must be mutual respect and interaction (Ben-Harush & Orland-Barak, 2019). Differences should be utilised positively for the sake of learning and those involved collaborate so as to extend and transform their understanding of practicum. In order for this to occur, it is necessary to establish forums for productive discussions.

The third space is a space where academic and practitioner knowledge is brought together and coherence can be negotiated (Richmond, 2019; Zeichner, 2010). From this study we have learnt that school visits, in their current form, are problematic as a third meeting space. In the third space, those involved need to recognize one another's knowledge and the interaction must be based on respect (Bergman, 2017). Despite the willingness of mentors and supervisors to collaborate, and the desire of student teachers for better connections between schools and universities, it appears that the system does not facilitate such efforts. Practicum that counteracts what student teachers learn at university (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020) may be problematic. However, with constructive interaction, such disparity can also lead to explorative conversations and disagreement can be used to enhance critical thinking and develop new knowledge (Engeström, 2005; Penlington, 2008), and thus promote an ongoing negotiation of coherence.

The problem addressed in this study is shared. However, the sample is small, and data is collected from a specific context. It would be valuable to gain insight from future research into how the notion of coherence is perceived and addressed within different contexts of teacher education.

5. Concluding comments and implications

The study has provided insight into contextual opportunities and challenges in how meeting spaces in practicum can facilitate coherence by integrating coursework and fieldwork. One key factor is the establishment of conference spaces that encourage joint reflection and negotiation, and to reduce the focus on assessment. Collaboration between mentors and supervisors is essential to support student teachers in connecting practice and university coursework, to secure the quality of practicum and to avoid that practice is left to chance. Educated mentors can be particularly beneficial as can the development of trusting relationships between mentors and supervisors. This allows for interaction and learning from different perspectives. Conversely, hierarchy, dissonant interaction, and a lack of trust or respect for each other's knowledge can undermine the third space. Trust is essential in order to use disagreements for negotiation and for promoting understanding.

Teacher education needs mentors and supervisors who can facilitate student teachers' reflection and thereby support them to learn from teaching in an ongoing way. Assignments based on cases from practice can be particularly valuable in this regard. Theoretical and practical knowledge should interact in order to promote critical thinking as a foundation for further professional development. Meetings in the third space then appear to be crucial. However, it is not sufficient to gather people in the same room; the outcome depends on the quality of the interaction.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Marit Ulvik: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization. **Liv Eide:** equal contribution, Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review &

editing, Visualization. **Ingrid Helleve**: equal contribution, Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Visualization. **Edel Karin Kvam**: equal contribution, Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Visualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

References

- Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2018). *Reflexive methodology. New vistas for qualitative research*. Sage.
- Ben-Harush, A., & Orland-Barak, L. (2019). Triadic mentoring in early childhood teacher education: The role of relational agency. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 8(3), 182–196. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-10-2018-005>
- Bergman, B. (2017). Reflexivity in police education. *Nordisk politiforskning*, 4(1), 68–88.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, C. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Bullough, R. V., & Draper, R. J. (2004). Making sense of a failed triad: Mentors, university supervisors, and positioning theory. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55, 407–420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487104269804>
- Bullough, R. V., Jr. (2012). Mentoring and new teacher induction in the United States: A review and analysis of current practices. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 20(1), 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2012.645600>
- Butler, B., & Cuenca, A. (2012). Conceptualizing the roles of mentor teachers during student teaching. *Action in Teacher Education*, 34, 296–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2012.717012>
- Canrinus, E. T., Klette, K., & Hammerness, K. (2019). Diversity in coherence. Strengths and opportunities of three programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 70(3), 192–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487117737305>
- Carlsson, D. (2020). Representation and safe space. *Conflicting discourses in RE teacher education supervision, British Journal of Religious Education*, 42(1), 36–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2018.1556600>
- Cavanna, J., Molloy Elreda, L., Youngs, P., & Pippin, J. (2021). How methods instructors and program administrators promote teacher education program coherence. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 72(1), 27–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119897005>
- Clarke, M., Killeavy, M., & Moloney, A. (2013). The genesis of mentors' professional and personal knowledge about teaching: Perspectives from the republic of Ireland. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(3), 365–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2012.755513>
- Cochran-Smith, M., Barnatt, J., Friedman, A., & Pine, G. (2009). Inquiry on inquiry, practitioner research and student learning. *Action in Teacher Education*, 31(2), 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2009.10463515>
- Cohen, E., Hoz, R., & Kaplan, H. (2013). The practicum in preservice teacher education: A review of empirical studies. *Teaching Education*, 24(4), 345–380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2012.711815>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). In *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Vol. 3). Sage.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(3), 300–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105285962>
- Eldstad, E. (2010). University-based teacher education in the field of tension between the academic world and practical experience in school. *A Norwegian case. European Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(4), 361–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2010.504948>
- Engeström, Y. (2005). In *Developmental work research: Expanding activity theory in practice* (Vol. 12). Lehmanns Media.
- European commission. (2015). Education & Training 2020-Schools Policy. Shaping career-long perspectives on teaching. *A guide on policies to improve Initial Teacher Education, ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy*. <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/downloads/files/Shaping%20career-long%20perspectives%20on%20teaching.pdf>
- Flaget, M. A. (2021). *Praksis i lærerutdanningene. Hva kjennetegner vellykket og mislykket praksis? [Practicum in teacher education. What characterises successful and unsuccessful practicum?]*. Respons Analyse https://www.pedagogstudentene.no/globalassets/_pedagogstudentene/dokumenter/undersokelser/praksis-i-larerutdanningene_2021.pdf
- Fleming, J. (2018). Recognizing and resolving the challenges of being an insider researcher in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 19(3), 311–320.
- Fuentes-Abeledo, E.-J., González-Sanmamed, M., Muñoz-Carril, P.-C., & Veiga-Rio, E.-J. (2020). Teacher training and learning to teach: An analysis of tasks in the practicum. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(3), 333–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1748595>
- Grimen, H. (2008). Profesjon og kunnskap [Profession and knowledge]. In A. Molander, & L. I. Terum (Eds.), *Profesjonsstudier [Professional studies]* (pp. 71–85). Universitetsforlaget.
- Grossman, P., Hammerness, K. M., McDonald, M., & Matt Ronfeldt, M. (2008). Constructing coherence: Structural predictors of perceptions of coherence in NYC teacher education programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 273–287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487108322127>
- Gutiérrez, K. D. (2008). Developing a sociocritical literacy in the third space. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(2), 148–164. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.43.2.3>
- Hammerness, K. (2006). From coherence in theory to coherence in practice. *Teachers College Record*, 108(7), 1241–1265.
- Hammerness, K. (2013). Examining features of teacher education in Norway. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 57(4), 400–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2012.656285>
- Hart, A. (2020). Interpersonal dynamics of the supervisory triad of pre-service teacher education. *Lessons learned from 15 years of research. Georgia Educational Researcher*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.20429/ger.2020.170203>. article 3.
- Hatch, A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. State University of New York Press.
- Heggen, K., & Smeby, J.-C. (2012). Gir mest mulig samheng også den beste profesjonsutdanninga [Will large coherence also make the best professional education]? *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift*, 96(1), 4–14.
- Helleve, I., Eide, L., & Ulvik, M. (2021). Case-based teacher education preparing for diagnostic judgement. *European Journal of Teacher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2021.1900112>
- Helleve, I., & Ulvik, M. (2019). Tutors seen through the eyes of mentors assumptions for participation in third space in teacher education. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(2), 228–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1570495>
- Hovdenak, S. S., & Wiese, E. (2017). Fronesis: Veien til profesjonell lærerutdanning? [Phronesis: The route to professional teacher education?]. *Uniped*, 40(2), 170–184. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1893-8981-2017-02-06>
- Jackson, D. (2015). Employability skill development in work-integrated learning. Barriers and best practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(2), 350–367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.842221>
- Kemmis, S. (2010). What is to be done? The place of action research. *Educational Action Research*, 18(4), 417–427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2010.524745>
- Klemp, T., & Nilssen, V. (2017). Positionings in an immature triad in teacher education. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(2), 257–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2017.1282456>
- Korthagen, F. A. (2011). Making teacher education relevant for practice: The pedagogy of realistic teacher education. *Orbis scholae*, 5, 31–50.
- Kulelid, M., & Engelsen, K. S. (2017). Improvisasjon som bindeledd mellom teori og praksis i profesjonsutdanninga til lærarstudenten. *Tidsskriftet FoU i Praksis*, 11(2), 59–73. <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/2622041>
- Kvernbekk, T. (2012). Argumentation in theory and practice. Gap or equilibrium? *Informal Logic*, 32(3), 288–305. <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v32i3.3534>
- Loughran, J. (2014). Professionally developing as a teacher educator. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65(4), 271–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487114533386>
- Mercur, J. (2007). The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: Wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980601094651>
- Ministry of Education. (2013). Forskrift om rammeplan for lektorutdanning for trinn 8–13. [Regulations on the framework plan for teacher education for levels 8–13]. *Lovdata*. <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2013-03-18-288>
- Ministry of Education. (2015). Forskrift om rammeplan for praktisk-pedagogisk utdanning. [Regulations on the framework plan for post graduate teacher education for levels 8–13]. *Lovdata*. <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2015-12-21-1771>
- Penlington, C. (2008). Dialog as a catalyst for teacher change. A conceptual analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(5), 1304–1316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.06.004>
- Richmond, G., Bartell, T., Andrews, D. J. C., & Neville, M. (2019). Reexamining coherence in teacher education. Editorial. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 70(3), 188–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119838230>
- Smith, K. (2021). Educating teachers for the future school- the challenge of bridging between perceptions of quality teaching and policy decisions: Reflections from Norway. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(3), 383–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2021.1901077>
- Smith, K., & Ulvik, M. (2018). Ulike verktøy for profesjonell utvikling. *Veiledning av nye lærere. Nasjonale og internasjonale perspektiv [Mentoring of newly qualified teachers. National and international perspectives]*, (Vol. 2), Universitetsforlaget., 88–110.
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined places*. Blackwell.
- Ulvik, M., Eide, H. M. K., Eide, L., Helleve, I., Jensen, V. S., Ludvigsen, K., Roness, D., & Torjuslen, L. P. S. (2020). Teacher educators reflecting on case-based teaching – a collective self-study. *Professional Development in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1712615>
- Ulvik, M., & Sunde, E. (2013). The impact of mentor education: does mentor education matter? *Professional Development in Education*, 39(5), 754–770. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2012.754783>
- Valencia, S. W., Martin, S. D., Place, N. A., & Grossman, P. (2009). Complex interactions in student teaching: Lost opportunities for learning. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60, 304–322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109336543>
- Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college- and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1–2), 89–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347671>