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ABSTRACT

Research highlights the third space as a theory to enhance the practicum experience. This study explores how Collaborative Synchronous Coaching (CSC) can enable concepts found in the literature regarding the third space and initial teacher education (ITE). It used critical participatory action research to develop CSC and guide data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four triads, indicating that CSC is a new and practical andragogical technique to enable concepts of the third space in ITE. Pre and post-intervention surveys supported this conclusion. Authentic collaboration is facilitated, relationships de-hierarchized, and greater accountability encouraged, providing effective preparation of beginning teachers. A recommendation is to build a foundation of relational trust before implementing CSC.

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Third space; professional practice; partnerships; initial teacher education; coaching; bug-in-ear

Introduction

The strength of collaboration between schools and initial teacher education (ITE) institutions is a critical element in supporting trainee teachers to enable change in their practice and in their schools (Bernay et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2013; Whatman & Macdonald, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). Collaboration is applicable at all levels, with strong relationships required between school leaders, faculty staff, and individual teachers. Grudnoff and Williams (2010) assert that with this collective approach, it is possible to "devise practicum models that would align with a school's professional culture, meet university credentialing requirements, and contribute to more effective preparation of beginning teachers" (p. 35). The Teaching Council of New Zealand recently established this relationship as a requirement for all ITE programs "with mutual benefits that are explicit and interdependent, structured, and with a shared responsibility for success" (2019, p. 10). Globally similar recommendations exist. In Australia, the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2022) recommended that collaboration between the school and the ITE provider must be a high priority, and reciprocal relationships should be developed to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Post-COVID research from Ofsted (2021) highlights that effective communication between partnership schools and delivery partners is essential, and when absent, opportunities for effective ITE are diminished. In a New Zealand based study, Bernay et al. (2020) found that there should be trust, mutuality and reciprocity for the relationship to be successful. Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) add that the practicum experience should be underpinned by a commitment to professional learning communities where all teachers' ongoing professional learning journeys are prioritized. This research aims to support the expectation of collaborative relationships by exploring collaborative synchronous coaching (CSC) and the third space. The Third Space Theory by Homi Bhabha (1994) explores the idea that cultural identities are not fixed or binary but fluid and constantly evolving in the interstitial "third space" where different cultures intersect and hybridize.

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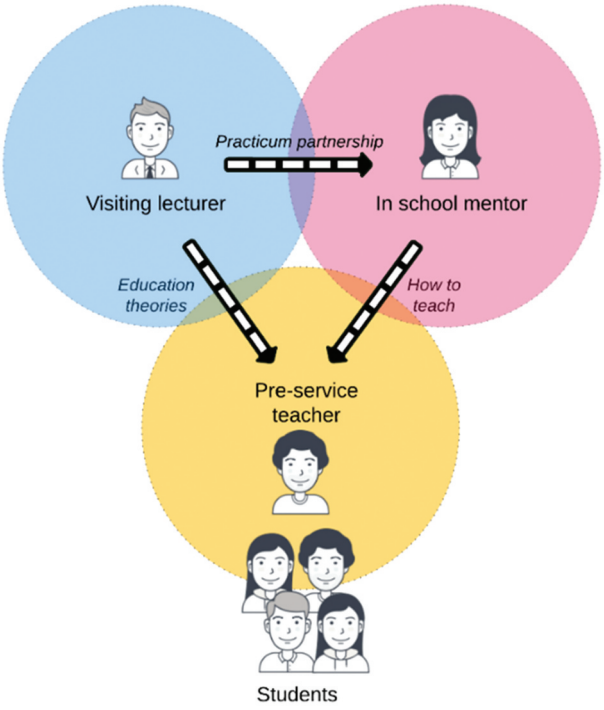

Figure 1. Traditional teacher training triad. Adapted from Bernay et al. (2020).

Rationale for the Study – Balancing the Triadic Relationship

The experience of all members in the triadic process can fail to meet the high expectations required for collaborative relationships (Cohen et al., 2013; Connolly et al., 2020; Haigh & Ward, 2004; Zeichner, 2010). The primary researcher in this project has been a preservice teacher (PST), an in-school mentor (ISM) and a visiting lecturer (VL) throughout his career and has had first-hand experience of the power imbalance between the roles. Complexity exists within the interactions; each party must understand roles and responsibilities for the practicum to be of value. Traditionally, the university led the approach (Figure 1) and involved three main parties with a top-down approach from the university. A gap exists between the separate spheres of the triad where communication and collaboration are difficult to establish and maintain. VLs conduct visits, observe, set goals and lead the hierarchy (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).

An overpowering influence from the school and mentor teacher can also exist (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Haigh & Ward, 2004). If priorities held by the ITE institution and the mentor do not align, PSTs can receive mixed messages and experience a power imbalance and a loss of professional agency (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014). Haigh and Ward (2004) concluded that the collaborative framework in the triad is only partially realized through the "triadic assessment dialogue" and that "more explicit discussion between the three partners regarding the practicum-related expectations of PST students, associate teachers and VLs may lead to a richer understanding of partnership roles and possible reform of the culture of the practicum" (p. 145).

Crossing Boundaries to Collaborate

Zeichner (2010) suggests a *boundary-crossing* approach to integrate and understand the differing triadic perspectives. Grudnoff and Williams (2010) found that co-construction between the expert and

novice enabled a more authentic experience. In their study of an alternative practicum approach, the PST felt supported when the ISM and the VL worked together to discuss teaching practice and varying perspectives for improvement. Despite the ISM and the VL noticing different strengths and weaknesses in the PSTs practice, having a broader range of input was beneficial if applied in an agentic and co-constructed way.

Further to the traditional method depicted in Figure 1, Bernay et al. (2020) propose two different approaches to support collaboration. They align with Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) and suggest an aspirational evolution for the triad, focusing on professional learning that supports classroom practice for the professional learning community and the entire school community (2020, p. 140). A central theme in this progressive approach is the concept of a *hybrid* space (Bernay et al., 2020), or as Green et al. (2020) define, the *third space*.

Collaborative Partnerships in the Third Space

The concept of the third space is rooted in social-cultural theory, which explains how an individual's identity comprises various overlapping characteristics. It was first introduced by Bhabha (1994) to describe the space where cultures intersect and merge, resulting in new hybrid identities. Over time, various scholars have expanded upon this concept in different fields. Soja (1996) focused on urban environments and how the interconnectivity of physical, social, and mental spaces shapes our experiences and identities. Soja's work has emphasized the importance of spatial practices in shaping social relations and highlighted the third space's potential to challenge dominant discourses and promote social justice.

In education, the third space approach suggests a holistic ideal that recognizes social and cultural constructs that are not necessarily visible in a traditional transmission-based classroom. The third space can help break down and understand the irregular forces of what is often a one-way cultural exchange. Kris Gutiérrez and her colleagues were among the first to apply the concept of the third space to educational research within the ecosystem of the literacy classroom. Here, the third space is defined as a place where knowledge is constructed between the official and unofficial spaces of the learning environment, enabling new learning to occur by supporting the learner to develop a hybrid identity (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). Gutiérrez (2008) states that the third space is a "transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened" (p. 152). Her work in applying the concept of the third space to educational research has emphasized the importance of this space as a site for the construction of knowledge. It has highlighted the need to cross physical, emotional, social, or cultural boundaries to create a shared vision and understanding.

The Third Space in ITE

In ITE, roles and responsibilities can be transformed to enable new opportunities to learn, reflecting the recommendations above of Bernay et al. (2020), Grudnoff and Williams (2010), and Haigh and Ward (2004). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) state that it is impossible to divide between practice and theory; there must be something in between. The third space can be seen as a network of bridges (Tatham-Fashanu, 2021) between the dichotomous physical separation of the campus, where PSTs are guided through the theory of the classroom, and the classroom itself, where the theory comes to life (Cuenca et al., 2011). On a less visible level, the third space can be regarded as a paradigm shift toward a collaborative and democratic environment for relationships to evolve (Williams et al., 2018). There are opportunities to break down historical hierarchies in the third space; this can be supported to enable a shared vision that will benefit the PST and the learners with whom they work. Zeichner (2010) states that applying the third space

in ITE creates expanded learning opportunities and prepares PSTs to enact complex teaching practices.

Constructing the Third Space in ITE

Several studies have applied various tools to enable the third space in ITE. Cuenca et al. (2011) used breakout sessions to establish the third space. They found it enabled participants to access new conversations, refine more focus for field observations and cultivate deeper relationships. Youens et al. (2014) encouraged PSTs to video and share their practice with the VL and ISM, creating a learning conversation that connected the third space between the triad. There was "multi-layered potential of the 'learning conversation' model to disrupt traditional hierarchies of knowledge and to generate new modes of interaction at the intersection of school and university spaces" (p. 109). However, these studies did not include input or collaboration from the school or mentor teacher, a critical element as referenced by Haigh and Ward (2004); the focus was on two parties rather than the triad, indicating that there is a gap in the literature with regards to a collaborative triad and the third space. Daza et al. (2021) constructed a comprehensive overview of relevant research regarding the third space in ITE. In line with the ideas from Bhabha (1994) and Gutiérrez (2008), the main themes uncovered in the work from Daza et al. were "negotiating identities" and the "intersection of epistemologies." Recommendations were that "future research might focus on the opportunities that digital technologies offer to foster a third space of professional practice in ITE" (2021, p. 12).

Synchronous Video Coaching in ITE

With the affordance of recent technologies, new opportunities exist to enable concepts of the third space with technology. It has been established that video footage of teachers can improve practice and reflection (Dann et al., 2017; Sherin & van Es, 2005). Evidence of synchronous video feedback exists in various contexts (Franklin et al., 2018; McCoy et al., 2018; Widodo & Rozak, 2016), with relative success in developing practice and critical reflection.

Bug-in-ear (BIE) coaching has been evaluated as an effective tool for synchronous feedback (Rosenberg et al., 2020). A key characteristic of BIE technology is the ability to modify how feedback is provided and acted upon, which is closely associated with single-loop feedback processes (Carless, 2019). By having a direct and discreet link to the PST, the VL or ISM can communicate in real-time using remote virtual feedback via video observation and a BIE device without disrupting the flow of the teaching episode (Horn et al., 2020; Scheeler et al., 2010). This approach is particularly relevant for PSTs, who often require scaffolding to perform evidence-based practices with fidelity (Rodgers et al., 2019).

While actions can be performed with fidelity, a criticism of BIE feedback is that it disempowers the PST by simply being instructed what to do. This has been mitigated in more recent BIE research through co-construction of the process between the coach and the teacher (O'Brien et al., 2021; Rosenberg et al., 2020). It is advised that a questioning approach supports good practice in BIE coaching (Gander & Dann, 2023). This supports the concepts of co-construction and agency within the triad to access the third space, as emphasized in much of the reviewed literature in the previous section (Green et al., 2020; Grudnoff & Williams, 2010; Sewell et al., 2017). However, there is a tendency for detailed feedback to increase the cognitive load of the PST, which can have a negative impact on teaching performance (Taylor et al., 2022). Remote video feedback has been particularly relevant during the pandemic due to challenges in performing face-to-face observations in schools and limited collaborative opportunities (Kidd & Murray, 2020).

Research Question

How might CSC enable concepts in ITE literature relating to the third space?

The concepts relating to the third space in the ITE literature are informed by "Partnerships as third spaces for professional practice in Initial Teacher Education: A Scoping Review" by Daza et al. (2021).

Methodology

Grounded in the Vygotskian paradigm that knowledge is social and constructed with others (DeVries, 2000), the study followed a constructivist framework, applying qualitative methods through critical participatory action research. Critical participatory action research is a collaborative approach that aims to empower individuals and communities by involving them in the research process (Kemmis et al., 2014). Following the literature review and recognizing the importance of flattening power structures within the triad, the authors believed this methodology was the most appropriate for facilitating participants' empowerment and the social co-construction of knowledge through critical dialogue based on the use of CSC and the findings. The approach involved a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, enabling participants to identify and address contextual issues (Kemmis et al., 2014). The cycles were applied to each use of the tool, where asynchronous feedback was collected through field notes, this enabled an iterative approach that improved application of the tool.

Provision of Feedback/Coaching

CSC is an andragogical technique facilitating the third space through video remotely and in real-time. Currently, a single solution does not exist to enable CSC. Therefore the research team collaborated with participants to create a virtual third space from various digital tools. IRIS Connect Rooms were set up to create a virtual link between the PSTs classroom and the remote locations of the ISM and VL. Whilst the PST was physically teaching at the school, the ISM and the VL were always remote, sometimes elsewhere in the school and at other times in a different city. The ISM and VL could both see and hear what was

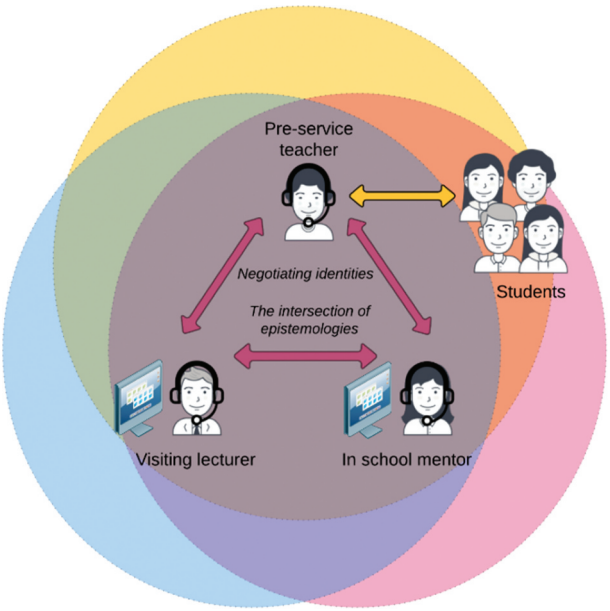

Figure 2. Collaborative synchronous coaching (CSC).

happening in the classroom, they could both provide feedback to the PST using a BIE device, and the PST could also communicate directly with the observers (Figure 2). A back channel was set up over Zoom between the ISM and the VL so they could discuss the teaching practice in real time without disturbing the PST during teaching. The gap identified in Figure 1 could be closed with multidirectional communication for each triad member. It is also important to note that the PST and the students, are placed at the top of the triad to disrupt the traditional power structure. Richardson Bruna (2009) claims that the third space exists without educators creating it and perpetuates a power imbalance when the dominant authority facilitates it. Therefore, it was important for the PST to initiate all elements of the interaction, for example, timing, location, and specific classes involved in the observation. The CSC sessions lasted from 20–45 minutes, and participants in the study used the technique between 3–5 times over six weeks.

Context

Participants in the study were PSTs studying on a two-year postgraduate master's level practice-based ITE course. Working relationships had been established in each triad before the study. Following the 2019 pandemic, visiting schools and observing teachers in person was challenging. The necessity to use technology to capture teaching practice evolved into a daily routine as teachers became more comfortable with video observations and reflecting on practice remotely. All 60 PSTs, their ISMs and VLs were invited to participate; twelve participants, including the lead researcher, opted into the study. Institutional ethics processes were followed, and consent was obtained. Pseudonyms were given to all participants in this study (Table 1).

School Contexts

All PSTs were teaching in decile 1–3 secondary schools in New Zealand. They had taught a specialist subject (English, Science, Design Technology) for two years at the same school. The study was conducted during the later stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when there were small class sizes and limited contact time.

Data Sources

Throughout the research, a constructivist approach to data collection was applied. The guiding framework for this study was drawn from a scoping review by Daza et al. (2021), who identified vital concepts to enable the third space in ITE (Table 2).

A survey was collectively developed with all participants; this reduced bias as there was a shared understanding of what was meant by the terms involved. The survey included open and closed

Table 1. CSC Participants.

Coaching triad	Position in program	Years teaching/coaching	Number of sessions using CSC
Triad 1			
Kurt (VL1)	Visiting lecturer (lead researcher)	20	5
Dave (PST1)	Pre-service teacher	2	
Chris (ISM1)	School Mentor	25	
Triad 2			
Annie (VL 2)	Visiting lecturer	17	3
Mark (PST 2)	Pre-service teacher	2	
Zoe (ISM 2)	School Mentor	23	
Triad 3			
Darcy (VL 3)	Visiting lecturer	20	3
James (PST 3)	Pre-service teacher	2	
Billy (ISM 3)	School Mentor	35	
Triad 4			
Aroha (VL 4)	Visiting lecturer	14	2
Joel (PST 4)	Pre-service teacher	2	
Phoebe (ISM 4)	School Mentor	20	

Table 2. Concepts to enable the third space in ITE.

Concept	Sub-concept
(1) Negotiating identities	a. Crossing boundaries b. Performing hybrid roles
(2) The intersection of epistemologies	a. Towards new pedagogical possibilities b. A digital third space c. Interconnecting knowledge sources

questions. There were dichotomous, multiple choice, checklist and Likert scale items (Appendix I). The Likert scale statements (1 = strongly disagree – 5 = strongly agree) were all positively framed toward the hypothesis that CSC supported concepts regarding the third space in ITE. It was completed by all four PSTs, two VLs and one of the ISMs before and after the research. Participants could use an alias in the survey to encourage openness in responses. Data was also collected through semi-structured interviews lasting between 40 minutes and one hour (Appendix II). The interview questions were co-constructed with participants and conducted over video calls at the end of the research, allowing for the collection of rich and detailed data about the participants' experiences and perspectives. Transcripts were shared and discussed, and participant feedback on findings contributed to the themes used for analysis. Ongoing field notes collected through participant reflections, reviewing the video recordings and discussion informed the evaluation of CSC.

Analysis

The within-subjects design pretest and posttest survey results were analyzed in SPSS. Only the ordinal data produced in the Likert scale questions was processed. The mean score for the sum of all ordinal data in the pretest (1) was 82.7, and the posttest was 92.1. Table 3 highlights the results of the paired sample t-tests, with the variable being the pre and post-results for all participants. The t-value is −3.213, and the significance value is 0.018. As $p < .05$, we can establish that there is a statistically significant difference.

When isolating the responses from the four PSTs, there was evidence of a greater significance, with the mean difference for the sum of the ordinal data being −15, the t value −7.071 and the two-sided p 0.006 (Table 4).

Overall, there was a positive correlation between the pre- and post indicating that CSC positively affected the concepts associated with the third space in ITE as defined by Daza et al. (2021).

Semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai and then thematically coded and analyzed in NVivo. The concepts identified by Daza et al. (2021) were used as a deductive starting point for the coding. However, an additional concept emerged through discussion with the participants on the themes and the findings. PSTs, ISMs and VLs discussed how accountability was an important element of the third space as identified by Taylor et al. (2014); however, it was not explicitly discussed in the findings from Daza et al. (2021). Challenges relating to concepts found in the third space are also explored.

Table 3. All Participants Pre and Post-Score Data.

	Mean	t-value	Two-sided p
Pre/post-test	−9.42857	−3.213	0.018

Table 4. PST Isolated Pre and Post-Score Data.

	Mean	t-value	Two-sided p
Pre/posttest	−15	−7.071	0.006

Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion are combined to maintain the flow between participant reflections on CSC and the established concepts from Daza et al. (2021) in Table 2 The structure follows the deductive and inductive themes.

Iterative Reflections from Field Notes

There were technical challenges with establishing and maintaining a digital third space. Bluetooth connections were inconsistent, and it was sometimes difficult for the ISM and VL to prioritize between the two applications, Zoom and IRIS Connect. Changing headphones and using multiple monitors mitigated these challenges. When providing feedback, allocating roles was not predetermined or explicitly discussed as a requirement in the technique's setup. The roles emerged unconsciously; participants commented on how it seemed most accessible if the feedback only came from one person; more than one voice in the PSTs ear was overwhelming. Participants suggested that the application of CSC could transition throughout the year. Recommending a focus on understanding the school culture and context at the beginning of the training, then moving into the more specific pedagogical approaches as the PST became more confident with classroom interactions.

Negotiating Identities

Daza et al. (2021) summarize that the negotiation of identities encompasses how "PSTs, TEs [VL and ISM] based in schools and universities, and administrative staff cross institutional boundaries, collaborate across contexts, adopt hybrid roles, and rethink their identities in the third space" (p. 5). These characteristics are inherent to establishing a third space in ITE and were apparent in participant conversations. Daza et al. (2021) split negotiating identities into the sub-themes of "crossing boundaries" and "performing hybrid roles."

Crossing Boundaries

The semi-structured interviews indicated that the digital third space creates a collective third space where it is possible to cross boundaries, in this instance, virtually through CSC. Daza et al. (2021) write that boundary crossing is typical with knowledge sources through the formation of new communities and opportunities to learn. With CSC, the ISMs conveyed that working closely in the triad unlocked access to another layer of knowledge through the VL. This reflects Zeichner's (2010) perspective of crossing boundaries where it is possible to integrate and understand other perspectives. Billy (ISM 3) commented that it was a real learning experience to be in an observation and talk to an experienced mentor simultaneously, bringing knowledge back into the school.

> It [CSC] gives us a bit more access directly to that expertise . . . There'd be nobody in our school who has done as much classroom observation as Darcy has. Getting that expertise . . . that's where the hierarchy, I think, shifts . . . . It is a real art; it is something quite, quite powerful.

Chris (ISM 1) agreed and commented that it is "a powerful thing to be able to have different people watching each other. It's really good for everybody's practice." Establishing learning communities with foundations rooted in constructivism is fundamental to successful practicum experiences (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Learning through CSC was community-based and reciprocal; Darcy (VL 3) also felt more confident and connected from the knowledge shared by Billy (ISM 3):

> One of the things that I've learned about myself as a mentor through this process is that often it can be quite an isolating role . . . going in with these big calls about what you're seeing . . . bringing your own assumptions, your own kind of knowledge and position and experience and, you know, hidden stories around what you think is best practice. So, I think for me, I learned that it actually is a collaborative process. This is really powerful. And it helps

> me as a mentor, in terms of hearing the perspective of the other person . . . . having that second pair of eyes kind of reinforced my thinking, gave me confidence to kind of share what I was thinking.

Jackson and Burch (2019) highlight that feeling safe is essential if the triad aims to be in a position where they can challenge assumptions and take risks. It is important to note here that Darcy (VL 3) was aware of the opportunity to question her assumptions in the process; this supports a deconstruction of the hierarchy within the triad through a new community of practice.

Virtual boundary crossing was not only limited to the ISM and VL; it also supported a deeper reciprocal understanding of the contextual knowledge in the school or classroom held by the ISM and the PST.

> I'm really conscious that I don't have the knowledge of the context. So I'm relying on you [Billy] as the in school mentor and James (PST) to be supporting me . . . I can never really truly know what that context is, because I'm other from it. (Darcy VL 3)

Chris (ISM 1) saw how the knowledge he held was valuable to the VL and how this could also support the PST. Possessing an awareness of personal experience and expertise in relation to others is critical in creating a meaningful third space (Sawyer, 2016).

> I had the tacit knowledge that I had about the boys, about the setting, about the dynamics within the group. There's a whole lot of stuff there that I guess was valuable to you [VL] or was interesting to you. As you said earlier, it contextualised what you were seeing . . . you were more focused on Dave's pedagogy and the strategies he was using around his teaching. (Chris ISM 1)

Joel (PST 4) also explained this approach also had pedagogical benefits that were previously siloed. "It was the bringing together of Aroha [VL], the pedagogical instruction with Phoebe's [ISM] curriculum specialty instruction, boom, you know, that combination was fantastic."

Performing Hybrid Roles

An element of hybrid roles defined by Klein et al. (2013) is where the PST re-negotiates their identity away from being a recipient of knowledge from the other triad members and toward an active peer and problem solver. For this to occur, a level of trust is required from all parties, and CSC enabled this dynamic to be established from the PST perspective. "Having a bit of like, urgency, and time, pressure, and aggressive transparency . . . makes us a bit more open and real and honest" (Mark PST 2). Changing the hierarchy of who decides the focus of the observation shifted the power back toward the PST. "Having the participant acknowledge what it is that they want to improve on is a way for them to be more open to the feedback that they're receiving as well and more open to listen" (Dave PST 1). Mark (PST 2) mentioned that the whole experience felt collaborative and shared toward a common goal, reinforcing the dialogic and democratic conditions of the third space, not just the collaboration of individuals but a space to mediate a shared understanding of the goals for the learning community (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). "It felt very shared, there was no dictatorial 'you must do this, you must do that.' It was all very suggestive and collaborative." To summarize the power shift Mark (PST 2) described the process of receiving CSC:

> If you're learning to drive, and the instructor has, like, the controls, and they can break at any point. Versus like, I don't know, if they're sitting in the backseat or something, they can't actually do it. Like, they're just relying on you to implement it. So, like the digital one. It's like, they can make suggestions. But, like, I can just ignore it, like, so I'm still kind of solely driving.

A heightened perception of responsibility puts the ball back in the court of the PST; they hold power as there are no other significant staff members in the room. All participants mentioned that the dynamic in the room was different because of a lack of presence of either the ISM or the VL. "I can see that maybe if you felt intimidated by having, like, more controlling people in the room that having them on the computer would be shifting the power balance back to the teacher" (Mark PST 2). The lack of presence stripped back the hierarchy. This empowers the PST; the students do not see them as being physically watched or observed. "It doesn't feel like I'm undermining Joel's practice, as opposed to

I would be if I was in the room" (Phoebe ISM 4). Another indication of a shift in the hierarchy was the move from a "tick box observation" to a "learning experience." Chris (ISM 1) elaborated; "I felt like we're all learning . . . seemed like there's less pressure on Dave [PST], in the past, lesson observations have felt more like an assessment . . . from both ends." Traditionally an observation is seen as an assessment in ITE (Youens et al., 2014) but using CSC, it was more of a reciprocal learning exercise according to the PSTs and ISMs. In New Zealand, reciprocal learning is known in Te Ao Maōri as Ako. It is fundamental to teaching and learning in schools, being positioned as one of the cultural competencies required to support indigenous Māori learners (Ministry of Education, 2011). Ako was reflected explicitly in the comments of some participants. "I do think the culture of, and the increase of Ako used in this process was really impacting [sic]" (Phoebe ISM 4). "I feel like the essence, and the culture of Ako is really put into place in this sort of a setting, rather than being taught what Ako is and that, it's like it's actually put into practice" (Aroha VL 4). The establishment of non-colonial spaces is an original third space concept (Bhabha, 1994), and this discussion demonstrates the ease of naturally breaking away from hegemonic narratives within the safe environment of the third space.

The Intersection of Epistemologies

Daza et al. (2021) found that out of the 36 studies which explored the third space in ITE, there were 29 that involved a convergence of epistemologies, these were subdivided into "towards new pedagogical possibilities," "a digital third space" and "interconnection knowledge sources." The cross-over of knowledge provided access to innovative approaches.

Towards New Pedagogical Possibilities

Darcy (VL3) emphasized that having "that back-channel opportunity to kind of debrief about what you're watching was helpful." Billy (ISM 3) agreed and indicated he found this helpful, and there would not have been the conversation in the first place, at least not without disrupting the teaching session. The provision of immediate positive feedback was "conspicuously useful" while being simultaneously inconspicuous. James, the PST in the triad, also supported this perspective. Accessing new conversations was also a strong theme in the third space ITE research from Cuenca et al. (2011). To have two people observing the same classroom synchronously, with the added ability to communicate unobtrusively, heightened the quality of the feedback between the triad.

Annie (VL 4) felt like there was more shared trust with the way that they were interacting in the observation; this reinforces the "working together" approach rather than "working with" (Jackson & Burch, 2019; Taylor et al., 2014). Participants also discussed a shared nature to the feedback provided: "I felt like I didn't have to look at everything . . . we could rely on each other, there were two pairs of eyes" (Aroha VL 4). Chris (ISM 1) noted the ability to look at a range of matters through different lenses:

> We were looking at it in different ways. I was aware of the guys [students] outside of the camera and the guys [students] sitting behind the camera, and at times . . . rather than being as focused on Dave [PST 1], I was more looking at how the students were responding to each other to the teacher engaging with their learning.

Joel (PST 4) mentioned the importance of having the multiple perspectives of both observers, rather than just one, had more impact: "It's a good balance of insight from the school as well as insight from studies." Joel (PST 4) also appreciated the ability of his observers to have "extra eyes" on the class.

> Just having Phoebe and Aroha be able to see things that I couldn't, and in a practical environment . . . and going, "oh, hey, you need to stand here." So more physical, spatial awareness . . . noticing things where kids might go off task. And, and I suppose that was helpful in terms of learning, okay, in the future, I need to be over here, so I'm noticing the whole room.

Mark (PST 2) agreed and said it was "like having an extra pair of eyes to like spy on stuff" as if you had "superpowers." It is perhaps critical to build on what Cuenca et al. (2011) discovered; third space interactions support a refinement of focus that may not have previously been accessible.

These instances of enhanced immediate feedback supported the development of practice by reducing the rate of error and, in turn, a rapid improvement. This is a common finding in real-time feedback scenarios (Rosenberg et al., 2020). However, adding another perspective from the second observer enabled a new andragogical approach, not accessible earlier in the teaching qualification. "I would have learned a lot faster. I wouldn't have kept making the same mistakes" (Joel PST 4). The way the feedback was delivered also evolved with more of a direct approach, perhaps linking to a more rapid progression of skills for James (PST 3); "She [ISM] felt that she was far more critical in that session than she would have been if she had observed me and then met for conversation afterwards." Darcy (VL 3) also felt like the feedback was more direct and to the point, meeting the needs of the urgency of a real-time situation. "I was a little more direct. One thing that I found helped with that, though, was the back channel . . . having that kind of conversation."

However, James (PST 3) acknowledged that the relationship had to be established for the more direct type of feedback to be effective. "I'm so comfortable to hear that feedback . . . if that relationship wasn't there, I would respond to it differently."

A Digital Third Space

While only 4 of the 36 studies investigated by Daza et al. (2021) were digital, the power of connecting in a digital space has the potential to reduce hierarchical approaches by suspending the constraints of "time and space" during professional practice (p. 10). A digital process was also relevant and welcomed as this study took place at the end of 2021 when all schools in New Zealand had experienced prolonged periods of lockdown for two years due to COVID. The pandemic negatively impacted the triadic relationship; however, the CSC supported stronger connections. "As a triad, it [CSC] did bring us together, like we all basically made more meetings, you know, outside of the TMCs [triadic mentoring conversations] . . . I got to know Phoebe better relationship-wise in comparison to other ISMs [who had not used the technique]" (Aroha VL 4). Darcy (VL 3) agreed and mentioned that the technique brought the triad together and strengthened the relationship:

> We've only met once in person, but I think doing the [CSC] sessions together kind of helped to strengthen our relationship . . . [It's] a really healthy thing to be doing in terms of a visiting mentor [VL], who can often, I don't know, be seen, as, you know, other outside external to a true mentoring relationship. So, I feel like this is a really useful, powerful tool in terms of developing that relationship between mentors.

Aroha (VL 4) stated that the approach also enabled a different type of interaction, perhaps more personal:

> I could have easily looked at maybe some of [ISM] Phoebe's observation notes that she had done with [PST] Joel, but I think it's the avenue of communication, you know, because everyone's talking. And I'm not just reading a document that I get a vibe, and even if it is online, I could still, you know, just with the small talk in between the mentoring as well, like that says a lot. It speaks volumes . . . It gave us obviously more opportunities to collaborate because we had to.

Being together in the same environment, trying to solve problems, for example connecting to the Bluetooth, and attempting something new enabled a unique way to connect as well as a more relaxed atmosphere as the participants were going through the same experience together: "The banter of the technology, like even that . . . that was cool. It just sort of relaxed the environment . . . you know, still professional, but still, you know, relatable, virtually, which was cool" (Aroha VL 4).

The digital aspect also enabled relationships to develop rapidly through the back channel with more opportunities to collaborate. Cultivating deeper relationships in the third space is a common outcome (Cuenca et al., 2011; Green et al., 2020). By choosing to engage on a personal level, individuals holding power can transition to power sharing (Wang, 2006); the virtual environment can be seen as the

middle ground and the environment to support this. There were connections made between the VL and the personal life of the ISM, crossing boundaries into the home of the ISM through the affordances of virtual observations.

> Face-to-face online and being able to see and have conversations with her [ISM] whilst we were watching it, I think that that actually helped develop that relationship quite quickly. Whereas, like, the sort of in-school situation, you didn't, I don't think we ever got to observe at the same time . . . if you sat in a classroom, you wouldn't have a conversation . . . [we are] working from home at the moment, so at one point, her kids were showing me drawings that they'd done. (Annie VL 2)

An ISM stated that CSC disrupted the silos that triadic educators are often assigned to.

> You'd have conversation with Joel, you might have conversation with Aroha. You might have the conversation with both of you in person, but it would be compartmentalised . . . This, I think, brought us all very close together in terms of communication. We could have that clear. We're all on the same subject. We're all talking about Joel. With Joel. It was way more collaborative than I've had in the past. (Phoebe ISM 4)

Haigh and Ward (2004) indicate that when this bond is developed, it facilitates consistent and reliable practice judgments.

Interconnecting Knowledge Sources

While there is overlap with crossing boundaries of knowledge, the interconnection of knowledge sources is another vital element that characterizes the third space. Daza et al. (2021) explain that vertical, top-down notions of knowledge are deconstructed, and more democratic professional practice models are created. Participants in the third space feel their knowledge is valued and contributes to the triad's overall outcomes. A theme here is how the interconnecting knowledge supports new learning opportunities for the PST (Grudnoff & Williams, 2010). As previously mentioned, having feedback from someone with contextual knowledge of the school and combined pedagogical knowledge is compelling for transformational practice. James (PST 3) found the combined feedback valuable.

> It's actually quite useful to have that kind of more unified voice . . . so having the two significant mentors in the same space to have that conversation and to find common ground, I think, is really effective.

The benefit of consistency was also explained by Dave (PST 1), who described a "lag" in the time it took for the ISM and VL to catch up with each other prior to using CSC:

> You're kind of comparing different lessons or what you've observed, and then you have to get on the same page. But if you both sort of observed those same lessons and are both on the same page, that feedback can be a bit more constructive.

The PSTs also acknowledged that it was helpful for the ISM and VL to observe the same lessons to understand more about the consistency of practice. "If something good or bad does happen, maybe with their like powers combined, they kind of know whether it's an ongoing issue, or whether it's like a one-off fluke" (Mark PST 2). There is often the challenge in ITE of the university suggesting one area to prioritize for improvement, and the ISM offering another area; this is confusing and lessens the impact of any feedback (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014). On occasions, PSTs can use this to avoid criticism; Mark (PST 2) likened it to being a student and attempting to "pull the wool" over the eyes of the teacher:

> It reminds me of, like, being a school student, like our class used to always whine that we had too many assignments. And I'd be like, "Oh, Annie, like, you can't give us this English assignment. Because Kurt already gave us a math assignment during that same day" But yeah, helping them like have, like, a shared view, rather than just like, we both do our separate observations, and we submit a report at the end of the year, and like, we don't have to speak to each other.

The opportunity to collaborate in the backchannel was a common theme in the feedback, as noted in "boundary crossing" and "new pedagogical possibilities." It also supported interconnecting knowledge sources.

> It was way easier communicating with Kurt, any feedback that I might have, that conversation that we were kind of having in the background, which you couldn't . . . just being able to have that conversation with someone as a fly on the wall. It was super, super interesting and valuable. (Chris ISM 1)

There is the opportunity for the varying perspectives to be combined, again flattening the hierarchy traditionally held by the VL. Overall, creating a shift in the epistemology of teacher education from where academic knowledge is seen as the authoritative source of knowledge on teaching to one where various aspects of expertise from the PST and ISM that exist in schools and communities are brought into teacher education, coexisting on an equal plane with academic knowledge (Zeichner, 2010).

Sewell et al. (2018) emphasize that the "divide between the ivory tower and the chalkface of the classroom" (p. 322) is at the center of the debate regarding the school-university partnership. The cross-over of the almost opposing cultures can create tensions within the triadic collaboration, drawing clear parallels with what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) describe as conceptions of teacher learning. They acknowledge that neither the institution nor the school has the expertise to initiate development in education; it requires a collaborative effort. They explicitly state that it is not helpful to regard theory and practice as separate elements applied in different contexts, which are often divided by the ITE provider, and the school. What is more productive is an approach that supports a "knowledge of practice" which can be found by understanding the broader social, political, and cultural issues by working in professional learning communities. CSC, and particularly a blended approach in which the focus shifts fluidly from a practical or contextual focus to a pedagogical and theoretical focus, could be a solution depending on the progress of the PST. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) maintain that "practice is more than practical, that inquiry is more than an artful rendering of teachers' practical knowledge, and that understanding the knowledge needs of teaching means transcending the idea that the formal-practical distinction captures the universe of knowledge types" (p. 274).

Accountability

Through inductive thematic analysis accountability was identified. By creating shared goals monitored with more of an "overseeing eye," the PSTs appreciated the unified voice, which enabled greater transparency, leading to accountability. These areas are not explicit in the review from Daza et al. (2021) however establishing conditions for critical discourse is a central tenet of the third space (Bhabha, 1994); transparency and accountability can facilitate this environment through a dialogic approach to competing discourses (Moje et al., 2004). James (PST 3) explained the benefits of having greater accountability through using CSC:

> In those kinds of follow-up conversations that I have, after an observation, I find it easy . . . [and] talk about things more broadly and thematically and find a space where I'm having that conversation in a way that I'm really comfortable. And I find it quite easy to navigate away from the questions that I find difficult in those conversations. Whereas by having two people in the room for me, as a participant, there's less space to hide because they're both offering different perspectives, they're both seeing the same thing. There's nowhere to hide; I find it quite useful to have a system which, to me, is a little more robust, makes me more accountable, and can be more critical as well. And then I know that, yeah, there's less space for me to kind of wriggle out of the uncomfortable gaze of the mentor sometimes.

Mark (PST 2) also held this sentiment, who felt it was possible to "fake it" through the TMC. "In this situation [CSC], it's very open and honest and real, which I think is better . . . if something goes bad, you guys are gonna see it, and we're going to talk about it." The third space often requires an uncomfortable tension; the critical discourse emerges within this. Mark (PST 2) continued to explain that all parties had an open and personal stake in the outcome of his professional experience; they were working together in a collaborative environment with more "ownership" rather than just "with." "They'd be more invested in it. Because they're like, 'I'm part of the assessment now'." The accountability of other members in the triad was noted by Chris (ISM 1), who reflected on past experiences

where he had minimal contact with the VL; beyond completing check box lesson observations. By using CSC, he felt he should make more effort.

> My dealings with that other student teacher [who was not using CSC] . . . were completely with her. Anything else that I did was online, filling out lesson observation forms. I think I would probably be more inclined to put more effort and energy into my role if I'd had some contact person with the institution. But they'd been, yes, just faceless . . . without sort of any deeper connection.

Annie (VL 2) also noted the open accountability of all staff to be contributing after suggesting that some students have not had any observations for a term:

> In some schools where the in-school mentors haven't done a great deal, I think that having that sort of responsibility and collaboration where you're like, you know, you were going to make this appointment, you're going to do the observation

Potential Challenges

The technology was a consistent area that participants discussed when asked what could have been different when using the approach. While this led to opportunities to connect and solve problems, it was also a source of frustration and required improvement. The VL guided the use of the tool, and without this technical expertise, it may be challenging to implement in broader contexts with reliable results. Sinclair et al. (2020) also encountered similar challenges with implementation fidelity at a school level when using BIE feedback.

Provision of feedback created tensions in the third space. Coaches in the study had previously been encouraged to develop reflective dialogue (Hinojosa, 2022), where questions and prompts were used post-observation to promote critical reflection. Darcy (VL 3) explained this was hard "in the moment" as it felt uncomfortable.

> I find it quite difficult in the moment to be very direct . . . . Which I was actually quite nervous about . . . . Because that's not really how I mentor, you know, I wouldn't go into a mentoring conversation, giving that really direct feedback, straightaway, it would be more of a kind of organic, natural, asking some reflective questions.

Billy (ISM 3) felt that the approach was hierarchical, although they did not see this as a challenge due to the existing relationship between the triad.

> There's two of us on one side giving feedback . . . . A little like "dance, monkey dance," you know, from the outside. I'm not sure that's a problem, particularly in relation in the context of other relationships. But it does need to be borne in mind . . . . If you've got somebody who feels more vulnerable.

While James (PST 3) disagreed with Billy (ISM 3), the feelings discussed still require awareness, particularly if the relationship between the triad was not harmonious before using the technique.

Limitations

The Likert scale questions were all positively framed; this can have create a bias toward answering in a positive frame of mind (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009). The research team conducted the semi-structured interviews so there is the potential that the participant responses were influenced by their presence. Triads in this study were in positive working relationships, hence the interest in participating. It would be interesting to explore if CSC is effective with triads who had not worked together before or were not working well. More research is needed to assess if the PST does play an equal role in the triad, and additional focused studies are warranted to confirm a genuinely flattened power structure. There is also the challenge discussed in this study of the type of feedback provided: can a more directive approach still contribute to lasting change? In addition, no maintenance measurements were applied to understand any lasting effects. A more comprehensive range of data points would also be helpful to collect in the future, for example, the impact on learners in the classroom or analysis of dialogue between the triad.

Conclusion and Future Direction

This study reveals that CSC is a new and practical andragogical approach that can enable concepts of the third space identified in ITE literature. It supports authentic collaboration and the de-hierarchizing of relationships, particularly between the ISM and VL, to enable more effective preparation for beginning teachers by providing a supportive and nurturing learning environment. By removing the physical presence of the observers, educators using CSC can navigate their identities within the space more transparently, collaboratively, and constructively. The power of synchronous feedback from more than one person reframes the conversation into a new paradigm. In this context, the third space promotes dialogic discourse to create connections between social and cultural constructs, disrupting the binaries we are often placed in as educators. Creating authentic learning communities can bridge expertise gaps and increase the rate of PST development. Observers transition between traditionally divided epistemologies of knowledge to develop new perspectives, "to see something different while watching the same thing," and apply this to contextualized feedback in real time. This allows us to explore how this approach may be used to enhance ITE and the critical collaborative relationships that effective education relies on.

In this study, the third space is not merely a space that creates new possibilities but flattens a power structure that traditionally stifles collaboration. Co-construction can be de-colonized and evolve to support authentic indigenous spaces. Accountability is activated, supporting critical discourse to flourish with "nowhere to hide" through a dialogue of trust. Discomfort is an associated element; however, a recommendation is to build a solid foundation of relational trust before implementing CSC.

Disclosure statement

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Appendix

Appendix I

Co-constructed questions for the pre and post-test survey

Question: Please respond to these statements regarding how you currently feel you work as a triad (the team of the Pre-service teacher, the In school mentor and the Hoe Ākau). 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree
The school, the ITE provider and the pre-service teacher are well connected
I feel like there is a strong connection between the coursework, the school the classroom
I feel like I understand my roles and responsibilities
I feel safe in this triadic relationship
I understand the professional contexts of the other members in the triad
I can negotiate my personal and professional identity.
I feel like there is reciprocity in the triadic relationship
I feel like I can perform different roles as a learner, mentor and coach
I feel like the triad works together to support collaboration and sense making
I feel like there is a neutral space within the triad where everyone has equal influence
I feel like I work together, rather than in parallel to the other members of the triad
I feel like we can create new possibilities
I feel like the triad operates as a community of practice
I feel like the triad works well in a digital space
I feel comfortable engaging in pedagogical dialogue with the other members of the triad
I feel like my knowledge is valued
I feel like my opinions are valued
I feel like we can construct knowledge together
I feel like there is collaborative engagement
I feel like there is critical engagement
I feel like there is a good connection between the practice and the theory

Appendix II

Prompts for participant questions in semi-structured interviews.

Question
Which aspects of collaborative synchronous coaching were most effective and why? What could be different next time?
What observable and measurable impacts on teaching and learning were there?
What specific parts of the process are the most significant and why?
What did you learn about working with the other members of the group?
How about communication methods? Did it impact dialogue?
What happened to the collaborative relationship through using CSC?
Do you think your role changed at all?
How did you develop the focus of the observation and the feedback?
Were there any new or different types of conversation
Were there any new opportunities to create knowledge?
Were there any surprises?
Anything else?