TEACHER EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

“It’s just really not me”: How pre-service English teachers from a traditional teacher education program experience student-teaching in charter-school networks

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Abstract: Though teacher educators nationwide are considering ways to provide urban placements for pre-service teachers (PSTs), little research has examined how PSTs experience placements in schools operated by charter management organizations (CMOs). This study considers CMOs—which often hold particular instructional and classroom management philosophies—as a specific type of school-based learning environment. We draw from a Discourse analytic theoretical framework using qualitative methodology to study how three English education focal PSTs experience disconnections between student-teaching placements at CMO schools and their teacher education program. Findings suggest three ways teacher educators can support PSTs in navigating school-based learning. PSTs in this study experienced contexts and philosophies that varied greatly between their schools and teacher education program. Implications include: (1) PSTs must feel that others in their schools value their learning; (2) PSTs in cohorts must feel they belong to learning communities; and (3) PSTs need support in confronting paradoxes they face between theory and practice.

Subjects: Action Research & Teacher Research; English; Teacher Training

Keywords: English education; charter schools; teacher education; field placements; Discourse analysis

ABOUT THE AUTHORS
April Salerno and Natasha Heny are both experienced teachers and educators, whose work primarily focuses on preparing and providing professional development for English teachers. The current article grew out of their work researching their own practice, while serving pre-service teachers student-teaching in a variety of school environments. April Salerno is currently serving as a Fulbright Scholar at Ion Creanga State Pedagogical University in the Republic of Moldova. Natasha Heny is an assistant professor of English education at the University of Virginia’s Curry School of Education. Both authors hold PhDs in English Education from the Curry School.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
Appropriateness and effectiveness of charter schools is a popular topic of discussion in education today. This article looks at a less discussed but important aspect of charter schools: what the environments are like for student-teachers learning to teach in charter-school classrooms. We follow three English student-teachers and the particular experiences they face working in charter schools run by larger charter management organizations. These CMOs are frequently characterized by their policies for managing students, including, for example, strict behavior rules and discipline policies and their particular approaches to instruction. We consider how student-teachers encounter these policies after studying in a traditional teacher education program, aimed at preparing them for structural norms at public, non-charter schools. This study invites further discussion regarding the role of charter schools in training pre-service teachers.

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1. Introduction

Appropriateness and effectiveness of charter schools is a popular topic of discussion in education today. Within both popular and professional discourse, there is heated national dialog about the appropriateness of charter schools—specifically those run by large management organizations—for educating urban students. Popular media have portrayed charter schools as either “producing miracles” (Baker, 2014) or as “schemes” that “shift tax dollars away from schools serving black and poor students” (Fenwick, 2013). Professional researchers have considered charter schools’ academic outcomes (Angrist, Dynarski, Kane, Pathak, & Walters, 2012; Silverman, 2013). Yet despite the much debated nature of charter schools, a specific population—pre-service teachers (PSTs) completing student-teaching assignments in schools run by charter management organizations (CMOs)—has been largely overlooked by current research. This article looks at a less discussed but important aspect of charter schools: what the environments are like for student-teachers learning to teach in charter-school classrooms.

Examining experiences of PSTs in these settings, as we do in the present study, holds promise for learning how teacher educators can better support student-teachers in diverse field placements and prepare them ultimately to teach in urban classroom settings. We follow three English student-teachers and the particular experiences they face working in charter schools run by larger CMOs. These CMOs are often characterized by their policies for managing students, including, for example, strict behavior rules and discipline policies and their particular approaches to instruction. We consider how student-teachers encounter these policies after studying in a traditional teacher education program, aimed at preparing them for structural norms at public, non-charter schools. This study invites further discussion regarding the role of charter schools in training pre-service teachers.

In recent years, national attention has turned to the idea that PSTs need student-teaching experiences in diverse, urban schools in order to better understand how to work in these environments and ultimately to provide better education for urban students, many of whom are from ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Citing research that teachers prepared in clinically based urban programs have higher retention and efficacy rates, for example, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010) calls for “a dramatic overhaul of how teachers are prepared” (p. 2). In many teacher-education contexts, however, including where we work, providing such experiences is not without challenges. Our teacher-education program is located in a large state university in a small college town, well removed from a large, metropolitan center. Placing PSTs in charter schools in cities requires their working at a distance. Recently, we have had several PSTs opt to complete student-teaching in distance placements to have such experiences, and we have seen these PSTs face challenges unique to their environments.

We use Gee’s (2011a, 2011b) idea that people build meaning through Discourse to examine how PSTs construct disconnections between their charter-school and teacher-education environments. We perhaps risk pessimism by focusing on tensions experienced in placements. Certainly, PSTs did describe positive aspects of their placements, particularly that they gained experience with students from low-income families. But we believe that through understanding disconnections, rather than connections, we might better understand how traditional teacher-education programs can work in concert with varied school settings, such as those in CMOs. Our findings illustrate how misaligned school-based and teacher-education environments send confusing messages to PSTs. Though we believe such misalignments are likely present in subtle ways in many student-teaching environments, we believe misalignments in these PSTs’ charter-school placements are pronounced in ways that are specific to their CMO contexts and are important for teacher educators to understand in placing PSTs in CMO schools. We approach this work with humility, from a practitioner-researcher viewpoint, understanding that we can learn to improve our practice from mistakes made and hoping that knowledge generated from our study might help other teacher educators and CMO administrators to structure meaningful school-based experiences for PSTs.
2. Literature review

2.1. Connections between student-teaching environments and teacher-education programs

Our PSTs said they wanted to complete student-teaching in CMO schools because they wanted significant experience in diverse environments. Literature, indeed, points overwhelmingly to the importance of understanding connections across PSTs’ teacher-education programs and other environments, including field placements, in studying PSTs’ preparation for diverse classrooms. Grant and Gibson (2011) argued:

Teacher education does not occur in isolation. Commitments to diversity, equity, and multiculturalism are also impacted by the university at large, by K-12 school structures and climates, and by policy at the local, state, and federal level. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of teacher education and these other factors is essential. (p. 34)

Ironically, however, in their review of 152 articles studying diversity and teacher education, they found only 15 pieces examined PSTs’ field experiences and/or mentor teachers, despite that many of the articles (n = 38) addressed the significance of placements and mentors in shaping PSTs’ beliefs. Grant and Gibson (2011) concluded that the area of field placements “begs for research” (p. 33). How to best structure placements is especially of concern, given that Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2009) found evidence that oversight of student-teaching experiences can be linked to student achievement during PSTs’ eventual first year as full-time teachers.

Many questions, however, remain unexplored about PSTs’ school-based learning experiences, especially questions related to diverse student populations. Literature, in fact, is not without conflict regarding the benefit of PSTs’ placements in challenging school environments. Haberman and Post (1998), for instance, argued PSTs should be placed in “the worst urban poverty schools,” thereby making “the issue of transfer of learning moot by preparing teachers to work in the very schools and communities where they will continue to teach after certification” (p. 104). Ronfeldt’s (2012) research, however, questioned whether PSTs should be placed in challenging environments, which he measured by how hard schools were to staff. In studying 3,000 New York City teachers, he found that learning to teach in easier-to-staff schools had later positive effects on teacher retention and student achievement during PSTs’ first five years of full-time teaching, regardless of whether PSTs went to work full-time in easier- or harder-to-staff schools. In discussing results, he conjectured, “prospective teachers are learning something from easier-to-staff schools that helps them become more effective and better able to persist as teachers of record in NYC schools” (p. 20). A converse interpretation might also suggest PSTs are not learning that same “something” in harder-to-staff schools. Such conflicting ideas as Haberman and Post’s (1998) and Ronfeldt’s (2012) findings leave room for uncertainty regarding the efficacy of challenging placements for PSTs. As Ronfeldt (2012) discusses, even if his results are to be believed, the question remains of: what is that “something” that is happening in easier-to-staff schools that is not happening in hard-to-staff schools?

While Ronfeldt gauged effectiveness of PSTs’ placements using retention and achievement scores, others have used different measures. In reviewing two decades of literature on urban-school field placements, Anderson and Stillman (2012) grouped literature into four themes, reviewing articles about PSTs’ changes in beliefs, their learning about teaching practice, consideration of context and culture, and the mediated nature of PSTs’ learning. They found that empirical work offers “a relatively cloudy” window into student-teaching’s effects on PSTs (p. 36). Most reviewed articles about PSTs’ beliefs, for instance, found positive changes, including greater feelings of preparedness, commitment to working in urban schools, and cultural competence. Some, however, reported more mixed or even negative results, including that PSTs even appeared to develop negative stereotypes of urban environments.
Anderson and Stillman (2012) report cloudiness, too, in findings about PSTs’ learnings about practice, though they attribute some uncertainty to “analytical strength—in particular, more nuanced attention to complexities that warrant such attention” (pp. 40–41), revealing findings which ultimately may challenge “the very idea of student teachings’ uniformly positive or negative contributions” (p. 41). In this sense, literature warns of not oversimplifying study of PSTs’ urban placements, of not expecting to see clear “positive” or “negative” results but of paying careful analytic attention to the sometimes murky nature of data examining PSTs’ school-based experiences. In considering studies of PSTs’ learnings about practice, Anderson and Stillman (2012) group studies into those focused on management; performance (i.e. PSTs’ enactment of instructional strategies); and facilitation of student learning. Regarding management, Anderson and Stillman (2012) challenge authors’ findings that urban schools require “more authoritarian” teachers (Rushton, 2000, p. 382) or a “firm and constant discipline plan” (Stachowski & Frey, 2003, p. 40), noting:

... scholars have long problematized the tendency to privilege management over instruction and to treat the maintenance of order and control as essential—and often as uniquely essential—in schools serving students of color and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds ... (pp. 38–39)

Of interest for our study is that these arguments related to urban school placements closely resemble some of the criticisms offered of charter schools systems. By definition, charter schools vary tremendously regarding structures and policies, and therefore, general environmental climates. Some, however, have faced criticism that commitment to safety can motivate overly strict discipline practices, “pushing out students who pose behavior or academic challenges” (Zubrzycki, Cavanaugh, & McNeil, 2013, p. 1) or creating a “militaristic social climate” (Lack, 2009, p. 145). Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) applaud how Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP Foundation, 2014) schools “put order high on its list of priorities,” providing an example from a KIPP school in Houston:

... students who break the rules—by failing to do the homework, showing disrespect toward an adult, visiting the bathroom without permission—go to “the porch”; they go to classes, but they wear their KIPP shirts inside out and cannot talk to or eat with their classmates. They become, in other words, social isolates, separated from their all-important peer group. (p. 57)

Lack (2009) criticized such practices, arguing “middle-class white suburbanites” would not tolerate them: “This is not to treat the disparate cultures of suburban and urban families monolithically, but simply to underscore the implicit inequity of describing coercion and humiliation as ‘what works’ for one group but as outlandishly inappropriate for another” (pp. 141–142).

Literature is sparse, however, on PSTs’ school-based experiences in CMOs. A possible reason is that CMOs frequently have their own systems of educating new teachers. DeArmond, Gross, Bowen, Demeritt, and Lake (2012) found CMOs managed teaching talent in three ways: “by recruiting and hiring for fit,” from teacher-preparation programs or alternative organizations like Teach for America; “by providing intensive and ongoing socialization on the job”; and “by aligning pay and career advancement to organizational goals” (pp. 4–5). DeArmond et al. (2012) depict “enculturation for new teachers” as a CMO response to high teacher turnover rates, resulting from burnout in environments with long days and intense teacher scrutiny (p. 28). Lake et al. (2012) add that CMO leaders attribute turnover to “the nature of the intensive work of serving an urban, low-income student population” (p. 36). CMO training “focuses at least as much on classroom management and planning as on effective instructional techniques and teaching content” (p. 36). Such models, when contrasted with values of traditional teacher-education programs which often by nature emphasize instructional and content issues, raise many questions about how PSTs who are studying in traditional teacher-education programs while working in CMOs, make sense of various messages about teaching practices.
3. Research question
This study considers: How do PSTs experience disconnections between student-teaching placements at CMO schools and their teacher-education program?

4. Theoretical frame
Though we use more general qualitative methods, we draw from Discourse analytic themes in framing our study. We view studying PSTs’ Discourse—with a capital “D”—as a means of understanding the sense-making process they experience while learning in what some may consider two competing environments. Gee (2011a) defined “big D” Discourse as “a characteristic way of saying, doing, and being” (p. 30). Big “D” Discourse is thus viewed not only as words but as the actions and identity embodiments surrounding and comprising those words. Similarly, Bloome et al. (2008) contended Discoursing can be both a noun and a verb, suggesting both being and acting. Gee considered Discourse an act of construction: “We use language to build things in the world and to engage in world building” (p. 15). One of the things built through Discourse, he argues, are connections: “We use language to render certain things connected or relevant (or not) to other things, that is, to build connections or relevance” (p. 19). Gee provides the example of Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, arguing that he can talk or write as if they either are or are not connected to each other. Using the word “fundamentalism” itself in reference to both, he remarks, is a connection-building device. Connections and disconnections are thus not inherent but can be effected or mitigated through language. For us, this theory is important in pointing us to examine how PSTs Discourse in ways that create disconnections between their CMO environments and teacher-education program.

In addition to building connections and disconnections, we view PSTs’ Discourse as capable of building knowledge. Hollins (2011) argued:

Changing the discourse in the social context for constructing knowledge in practice is important in mitigating the influence of the ideology of power and privilege in low-performing urban schools and for learning to teach students from diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds in preservice teacher preparation programs. (p. 125)

Through this project, we have embraced construction of knowledge through teacher inquiry on two levels: (1) some of our data comes from PSTs’ inquiry projects in their school-based learning experiences and (2) we view ourselves as practitioner-researchers.

5. Methods

5.1. Collection

5.1.1. Setting and data
Data come from a larger, longitudinal qualitative study of the three focal students’ entire cohort, as they progressed through two years of methods-course instruction and corresponding field placements at a teacher education program in a large state university in the Southeastern US. The program annually prepares about 125 PSTs to earn a two-year master’s degree in teaching or a five-year combined bachelor’s and master’s degree. PSTs were in the same cohort by content area, regardless of which degree they were pursuing. Most secondary PSTs in the program completed field placements in public, non-charter middle and high schools near the university. Methods-course observations indicate that PSTs in the English cohort received training that emphasized fostering student creativity and love of literacy, and encouraged teacher “subversiveness” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). This study focuses on PSTs’ full-time student-teaching semester. During this semester, PSTs worked in schools during the day and attended a seminar at the university one night each week.

5.1.2. Participants
In the larger study, we examined how PSTs experienced their teacher education program over time. We particularly examined how practicing teacher inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) was part of
their teacher education (Salerno & Kibler, 2014, 2015, in press). Though all 15 cohort members were included in that study, we focus this work on the three PSTs—Cecilia, Grace, and Marilyn1—who completed student-teaching in CMO environments (see Table 1 for focal PSTs’ demographic information). Cecilia was a BA/MT student who had completed her previous part-time placement at a local public high school. Throughout her schooling prior to student-teaching, she had worked to juggle life as a varsity athlete and her teacher-education requirements. Grace was a master’s student who completed her previous placement at the same school as Cecilia. Grace lived in graduate-student housing and was known among cohort members as someone who was always handy with providing an additional reading source when needed. And Marilyn was a BA/MT student who completed her previous placement at a suburban public middle school. She was well regarded in the cohort for her cheerful, friendly manner, bringing, for instance, decorated snacks to class on Halloween.

These three PSTs chose placements in CMO schools after CMOs recruited for student-teachers on campus. The teacher-education program permitted recruiting and supported PSTs by assigning them a supervisor and allowing them to complete assignments at a distance. Cecilia and Marilyn both worked in urban middle schools about two hours from the university. Their schools were part of the same CMO. Grace worked in an urban middle school in Texas, about 1,300 miles away from the university, in a different CMO. Due to these distances, Grace attended seminar discussions remotely every week. Cecilia, Marilyn, and Shawn, who completed a distance placement but is not a focal PST because she worked at a traditional public school, usually attended virtually but did attend face-to-face three times: (1) the first meeting, (2) when they gave class presentations, and (3) the final meeting. For these meetings, the PSTs clocked especially long hours, driving two hours after schools’ normally extended days, attending the three-hour seminar, and then driving home another two hours, before needing to teach again the next morning.

5.1.3. Researcher roles and data collection
Both authors assumed active roles in the cohort’s preparation across the four semesters of coursework and field placements. Given that we understand Discourse as involving words and actions, our data collection involved not only gathering PSTs’ words in interviews, discussions, and assignments, but also observing their practices in teaching field-placement lessons and participating in accompanying coursework. Both authors served as assistants in all of the cohort’s English-teaching methods

Table 1. PSTs’ demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PST</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
<th>Description of previous schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td>Female*</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>English**, Spanish</td>
<td>Attended a small, Catholic girls’ school in the same city as her student-teaching charter school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Filipino-American</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Kapangpangan*, English</td>
<td>Attended public school in San Diego, students predominantly Filipino and Latino; Majored in English and film studies at a public university in California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>English*, some Spanish</td>
<td>Attended public school in a wealthy suburban area of the same city as her student-teaching charter school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Focal students were typical of the remainder of the cohort in that all cohort members were female.
**Denotes first language.
courses. We took detailed fieldnotes and audio-recorded these sessions. Prior to full-time student-teaching, PSTs completed part-time placements at public non-charter schools located near the teacher-education program. The first author supervised these placements. During full-time student-teaching at CMOs, she supervised four PSTs who were not focal PSTs in this project; observed all other PSTs, except Grace, once; held audio-recorded debrief interviews with PSTs; attended and audio-recorded weekly seminar meetings; and collected PSTs’ lesson plans and written course projects, assignments, and reflections. The second author supervised Grace’s student-teaching via video and using remote video-conferencing software.

We work from a practitioner-research paradigm. Our work with PSTs for the teacher-education program included teaching them how to conduct inquiry in their classrooms and work toward knowledge generation and improvement of classroom practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In the spirit of practitioner-research, we do not feign neutrality. We recognize that by virtue of working in the teacher-education program, we are in many ways aligned with teacher-education philosophies and practices. We also have our own individual experiences with teacher preparation. The first author entered teaching through alternative licensure, never herself completing student-teaching, and eventually married a Teach for America alumnus. The second author entered teaching through a traditional teacher-education program in which she completed a full year of student-teaching. These experiences have shaped our viewpoints about what it means to become a teacher, including that we both identify relationship-building with students as foundational for learning. We expect our actions and beliefs in many ways impacted PSTs’ Discourse both within and about classrooms. Our goal is not to eliminate that impact but to study and improve it.

5.2. Analysis

5.2.1. Ongoing analysis

Throughout the longitudinal project, various research questions emerged that we could not have anticipated from the outset. Such emergent questions are fitting within qualitative, ethnographic work (Erickson, 1986). To explore these questions, we developed a system of writing and sharing conceptual memos (Heath & Street, 2008) with each other and the seminar professor, who collaborated with us. Throughout the project, we met weekly or biweekly as “critical friends” (Heath & Street, 2008) to discuss memos and tentative findings. During discussions, we found that the question of how PSTs were experiencing charter-school placements was a salient one. Quite honestly, we were perplexed to find that PSTs who had approached prior placements with excitement, were talking during CMO student-teaching experiences about abandoning teaching altogether. We suspected something was amiss in how these job-embedded experiences were or were not aligning with the teacher-education program, and we hoped greater attention to PSTs’ Discourse could reveal answers about why, so we could serve future PSTs better.

Once we identified the question about PSTs in CMOs, selection of our focal PSTs was obvious, as there were only three of them. We used a system of “data reduction” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to narrow our very large data-set to focus on data most pertinent to PSTs’ CMO experiences. These primary data sources came from the student-teaching semester, though data about focal PSTs’ experiences in primary semesters was used for “back-and-forth” comparison (Patton, 1990, p. 411). Primary data included:

- seminar and teaching observation fieldnotes and accompanying audio-recordings;
- transcripts of PSTs’ inquiry presentations, course meetings in which they described a challenge from their own student-teaching classroom and listened as other PSTs discussed the challenge;
- all assignments completed for the teacher-education seminar course, which PSTs attended while in student-teaching;
- interview transcripts and questionnaires;
- lesson plans and reflections; and
- PSTs’ school descriptions written for summative portfolios and placement evaluations.
Secondary data, which provided supporting or disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000), included supervisors’ and mentor teachers’ evaluations of PSTs; collaborative logs co-written by PSTs with supervisors or mentors; and data from previous field placements and methods courses.

5.2.2. Coding
Using NVivo software, we coded primary data for focal PSTs’ descriptions or discussion of charter schools. Our goal in this initial coding was as much as possible to capture all the discourse we had from each focal PST describing her student-teaching environment. This initial coding required little inference from us, as we then refrained from making judgments about themes or ideas. Informed by Erickson’s (1986) interpretivist views, we instead wanted to begin by considering all relevant discourse. When data involved dialog, we coded in “turn units” (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005), and we included all turn units on a topic. For example, if a PST mentioned a policy at her school and another cohort member asked a question about it, we included the initial turn in which the PST mentioned the policy, the question, and the PST’s response. When coding lesson plans, we initially coded the entire lesson plan as part of focal PSTs’ discourse.

As we completed initial coding, we began seeing thematic connections across data. We thus re-tackled data specifically related to CMOs in a round of “open coding” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 214) through which we labeled themes in PSTs’ discourse. When possible, we used “in vivo” labels (Strauss, 1987), derived directly from PSTs’ language. This coding was exhaustive in that we considered all data (though not all data fit into themes) but not mutually exclusive, in that data could be—and often was—identified as relevant to multiple themes. Through consideration of these themes, we found that PSTs’ discourse told a story about CMO placements and their disconnectedness to the teacher-education program.

6. Findings
We organized the story that PSTs told by presenting it in three segments that emerged, in our coding, as disconnects between the teacher-education program and the CMO placements: first, in explaining how PSTs describe their expectations for placements; second, in considering how PSTs describe their schools’ and placement structures; and finally, in examining PSTs’ discourse about the values of their schools and teacher-education program.

6.1. PSTs’ expectations
Cecilia, Grace, and Marilyn all discussed a sense of surprise that their expectations of placements did not fit what they actually experienced in CMO schools. The PSTs said they chose to work in CMO schools because they wanted “to be with an urban population of kids” (Marilyn) or to experience “a new challenge” (Cecilia).

**Cecilia.** Later, however, Cecilia reflected with regret on that initial longing for challenge:

I realized that the challenge of student-teaching should not be your environment. It should be yourself, like figuring out your own personality, the logistics that you need to get a classroom running, like it should all be about your internal, I was looking for an environment that would be challenging, and I feel like that was just a HUGE mistake.

At the first meeting of PSTs’ seminar, Cecilia told peers of her surprise at how she regarded teachers as acting differently toward students than they did in previous professional development days:

The staff at [the school]² are some of the most bright, organized people I’ve ever seen, and they are all clever, but when the kids came in all of a sudden I was in a militant surrounding. I will say and I have never seen so many people change. I was completely unprepared for the persona that came up, and I spent the first day trying to scrap together a tough exterior which is really difficult for me.
Cecilia’s description here began two themes present throughout data: (1) that she felt compelled in her school setting to become “an actor” in front of students and (2) that her schools were depicted as a “militant” environment. Cecilia used the term “actor” in a way that suggested fakeness; she said she felt that she could not be herself or even reveal her individuality with students in ways she wanted to. She used the term “militant” to highlight conflicts between teachers and students, describing teachers as strictly punishing students for disobedience. Fieldnotes indicate she sometimes used hand gestures with her arms straight at her side like a soldier to indicate the way she felt students were expected to respond. Eventually, Cecilia wrote in a final evaluation of her placement that she recommended the teacher-education program no longer place PSTs with her CMO.

Marilyn. Similarly, midway through her placement, Marilyn sent an email to her teacher-education program adviser, explaining she felt there was a gap between the teacher-education program’s expectations of her and what she was being permitted to do in her placement. While PSTs typically assumed full teaching loads for four to five weeks in the middle of the semester, Marilyn was instead given a small group of students to teach but not a full class. She wrote in a reflection:

In an “intervention” meeting with [the mentor] and [the school] Assistant Principal 7ish weeks into the semester, I was told that they couldn’t sacrifice student learning for my practice. This leaves me missing nearly the entire point of the placement. I am scrambling and hoping to make up for it.

At semester’s end, Marilyn had never had full teaching responsibilities for a class, and she consequently told her professor she was considering abandoning teaching as a career (see Figure 1).

Grace. Grace appeared to have had the most positive experience. By having completed extra summer coursework prior to her placement, she was able to graduate a semester early. She chose after graduating to continue teaching in her CMO for one semester, while she sought work elsewhere for the following year. Still, she suggested in seminar discussions and one-on-one interviews that her expectations were both met and unmet:

I really love it here, [April]. I love the students. I like the sixth-grade level team. It’s I guess not being able to do with ELA what I wanted to do coming into this associateship is what really gets me down.

6.2. Structures

6.2.1. CMO language

Throughout PSTs’ Discourse, it is evident that all three PSTs were taking up specific types of language present in their school environments but not present in their teacher-education program. This nuanced language involved schoolwide Discourse practices, such as using or requiring students to use hand gestures (e.g. to signal a request to visit the bathroom). PSTs called classes by school-assigned names, sometimes names of universities where advisor-teachers graduated. They referred to students as “scholars” and asked students to pay attention by “tracking” with their eyes (e.g. Grace: “Can I have a scholar read the directions?”; “I’ll know that you’re ready when you’re tracking me.”).

Figure 1. Excerpt from Marilyn’s meeting with her seminar professor, regarding future teaching.

1. Marilyn: Yeah, I mean some days- I mean bad days, it’s like there’s no way I can be teaching in the fall, and on good days, I’m like- I mean it would be really hard, I mean assuming that I would get hired and then um it would be like really, really hard, but it- but I guess it would be all right ((laughs)). Um, but I have thought-
2. Professor: “It would be hard WHY? Why would it necessarily be hard?
3. Marilyn: Well I just feel like I haven’t had the every single day it’s just you in front of a large classroom of students.
And they used language specific to school-discipline systems, similar to the example of students’ being on “the porch” in our literature review.

Through our observations, we noticed how this type of language—present in PSTs’ lesson plans, teaching, and discussions—combined with their adoption of school management practices to be described below, appeared to change the teaching persona of all three PSTs. The PSTs we saw teaching in CMO classrooms appeared substantially different from those we had observed in prior public school field placements. This was true for all three PSTs. In her prior field placement, we watched Cecilia move around her classroom, actively questioning students as she coached them toward making sense of example memoirs before they would eventually write their own. In her CMO placement, we watched her sit at a front podium, calling out students’ names who would receive demerits for not appearing to read during silent reading. With Marilyn, we watched her in the prior placement ask students about any personal experiences they had in caves, experiences which might link their own lives to Tom Sawyer’s cave adventures. In her student-teaching, we saw her teach only the small group of students she was allowed to teach, not a full class, and we watched as she coaxed students to pay attention to reading by offering them rewards stickers, rather than personal connections. And with Grace, prior to student-teaching, we saw her ask a class of students to contribute pages to a book, expressing through writing their own interpretations of wisdom, never raising her voice. In the student-teaching placement, we watched her frequently address students’ misbehaviors with threatening language: “At the rate we’re going, we will never get to play the game. Go ahead and keep making the noises. Go ahead.” In a sense, PSTs’ words and tones appeared to follow a pattern of behavior management they described as present in the CMOs, rather than natural to them as individuals. Such differences might resonate with Cecilia’s comments that she felt called upon to be “an actor.”

6.2.2. Peer relationships and distance placements

During student-teaching, we also noticed a change in how the three PSTs appeared to relate to other cohort members. While the three PSTs—particularly Marilyn and Cecilia who worked in the same CMO—talked about growing closer to each other (e.g. Cecilia: “And you know I’ve actually had so much support, like Marilyn and I support each other a lot”), they described a distance between themselves and other cohort members (see Figure 2).

Though Grace said that she also missed being present for course meetings, which, she said, kept her “grounded,” she also talked positively about building supportive relationships with other teachers at her school. In this sense, it is possible that her distance from peers might have yielded a positive result in forcing her to seek friendships within her school building in ways that might not happen with nearby placements. Because we did not observe Grace’s relationships with other teachers ourselves, we have limited data in this regard and would suggest future research to consider this possibility. We do know that geographically, the three PSTs were physically distant. In terms of supervision, this distance presented challenges in that supervisors, located near the university, did not visit PSTs’ schools frequently, or at all in the case of Grace. In terms of seminar participation, distance-attendance was made obvious when, for example, video-conferencing software momentarily failed, or when the professor addressed PSTs—all visible on one screen—as a group (e.g. “What about you all at a distance? What have you read? What do you want to share?”). After observing course discussions, we wondered whether the three PSTs participated in discussions at different rates because they were attending remotely with technology. To explore this, we conducted counts of PSTs’ turn units (Bloome et al., 2005) in whole-group discussions of both the seminar, when

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 2. Excerpt from Marilyn’s meeting with her seminar professor, regarding interaction with other cohort members.</th>
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<td>3</td>
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distance PSTs attended remotely, and the methods course prior to student-teaching, when all PSTs were physically present (see Table 2). Though Shawn, who was also at a distance, showed a decline in percentage of turns taken across the classes, this study’s three focal PSTs showed little change, all ranking approximately the same in terms of participation for both courses. These findings suggest to us that it was not the quantity of their participation in the seminars that was changing, but instead something about the quality of it.

Peers from their cohort did appear, however, to respond to PSTs’ different language and discussion of CMO structures. Typically, when the three focal PSTs began discussing some aspect of their experiences, another PST would interrupt with clarifying questions about contexts PSTs were describing. In a typical example, Karen stopped Grace from telling about a student she was struggling to reach in order to ask her why disciplinary procedures at Grace’s school required him to wear a different color shirt from other students (see Figure 3).

Grace then stopped her discussion of the student and entered a lengthy explanation of the school’s policy on shirt colors, to which Karen responded (see Figure 4).

Cecilia eventually joined the conversation, describing her school’s punishment of having students wear stickers: “I can’t say enough about how wrong it is to like physically brand someone as a bad kid. It’s just crazy.” Here, Cecilia openly expresses her disagreement with the school policy. But a complicated thing is also possibly happening among peers. As in this example, focal PSTs typically had to stop their discussion of their classrooms to give peers school contextual information. While other PSTs said they relied heavily on support gained by talking with each other about their placements, it is possible that such constant need to explain settings made it difficult for focal PSTs to share with and receive the same kind of peer support. Such an interpretation might also illuminate Marilyn’s comment above that she does not know what other cohort members are experiencing. It is possible she also felt they did not know what she was experiencing.

Table 2. PSTs’ total turns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods course before student-teaching</th>
<th>Student-teaching seminar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PST (% of total turns taken in whole-group discussions, ordered from greatest to least)*</td>
<td>PST (% of total turns taken in whole-group discussions, ordered from greatest to least)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen (13.2%)</td>
<td>Karen (17.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha (9.8%)</td>
<td>Lynn (9.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy (9.1%)</td>
<td>Samantha (9.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn (7.8%)</td>
<td>Grace (8.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace (7.6%)</td>
<td>Rachel (7.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia (7.0%)</td>
<td>Cecilia (7.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn (6.4%)</td>
<td>Cynthia (5.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (6.3%)</td>
<td>Amy (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn (6.1%)</td>
<td>Dawn (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda (5.7%)</td>
<td>Linda (4.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly (5.2%)</td>
<td>Shawn (4.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn (4.8%)</td>
<td>Marilyn (4.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia (4.0%)</td>
<td>Kimberly (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin (3.8%)</td>
<td>Elizabeth (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth (3.4%)</td>
<td>Robin (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total turns taken: 1,148</td>
<td>Total turns taken: 630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One PST took the methods course but not the seminar. For comparison’s sake, her data are excluded.
6.3. Values
Conversations with peers highlight not only differences in other cohort members’ understandings of PSTs’ environments but also of contrasts between CMOs’ values, as portrayed by the PSTs, and among the cohort, as a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) certainly undergoing its own “socialization process” (Hollins, 2011, p. 119) within the teacher-education program. Elements of various values across the CMOs and teacher-education program are difficult to disentangle into discrete topics, as many of the themes found in analysis are inter-related. For example, PSTs discussed how they viewed approaches to language and literacy instruction as leading to student-engagement problems, which then caused management issues, and that strict school management affected their student relationships, while not establishing strong student relationships resulted in greater need for enforcing discipline policies. Complicating this entangled nature of data is that PSTs certainly also have their own personal values, affecting how they portray the values of either their schools or the teacher-education program. In considering these factors, we return to our theoretical frame and the notion that PSTs are building their own disconnections through Discourse. We do not view these disconnections as representing any innate truth; indeed, through an interpretivist lens, there is no such thing (Erickson, 1986). Certainly others might build similar or different disconnections. We view these findings instead as representative of the version of truth that PSTs were Discoursing into existence.

6.3.1. “Subversive” teaching and instructional planning
While the CMOs where PSTs worked espoused models of learning targeted at increasing student achievement as measurable through documented progress and test scores, teacher-education professors espoused a critical perspective toward teaching and learning. A central element of the English-teaching methods course prior to student-teaching, had been PSTs’ reading of Postman and Weingartner’s (1969) Teaching as a Subversive Activity. In exploring this text, the professor had led the cohort in an inter-active “human-machine” activity enacting the authors’ practice of “crap-de-tecting”: “… one of the tenets of a democratic society is that men be allowed to think and express themselves freely on any subject, even to the point of speaking out against the idea of a democratic society” (p. 1). PSTs working in CMOs drew contrasts between teaching in their environments and being subversive; all three PSTs said it was difficult to follow very strict curricula after their teacher-education program had taught them to approach lesson-planning with creativity in response to students’ interests. Cecilia explained:

> It was just really hard to find my own rhythm with lesson planning because I struggle to just follow directions when I know that I could do it differently like the way I want to do it, and it crossed the line from working within constraints to working as a robot.

“Working as a robot” contrasts with Postman and Weingartner’s (1969) ideal of the “new kind of person” in the “new education”: “an actively inquiring, flexible, creative, innovative, tolerant, liberal personality who can face uncertainty and ambiguity without disorientation” (p. 218).
### 6.3.2. Language and literacy approaches

While PSTs said they learned in methods courses to value creativity, to approach reading through students’ interests (Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001), to engage students in literacy through short texts (Campbell, 2007), or to teach conventions using mentor texts (Gallagher, 2011), they said CMOs’ approaches to literacy differed significantly, focusing on large quantities of reading practice and direct instruction related to language-related knowledge rather than skills, all aimed at boosting test scores. In observations and lesson plans, too, we saw PSTs focus instruction on discrete grammatical concepts and long periods of silent, individual reading. We analyzed how the three PSTs defined essential elements of language arts instruction, just before and just after their placements, along with the elements they felt most and least prepared to teach (see Table 3). Prior to student-teaching, the three PSTs had listed some form of creativity (indicated in Table 3 by underlining) as important and had said they were most prepared for those teaching activities. Afterwards, only Grace listed creativity as important, adding that she now felt most prepared to teach comprehension rather than creativity.

She explained in an email to her supervisor that she herself felt the need to be creative in order to be “subversive”:

#### Table 3. What PSTs identified as the “essential components” of language arts curriculum and the elements where they felt most and least prepared to teach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PST</th>
<th>Before student-teaching</th>
<th>After student-teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ability to read/reading comprehension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ability to write/writing proficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ability to communicate original thoughts, arguments, analyze, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most prepared:</strong> Ability to communicate original thoughts, arguments, analyze, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Least prepared:</strong> Ability to write/writing proficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most prepared:</strong> Openness to being yourself [in other words, allowing space for the students to be themselves]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Least prepared:</strong> Openness to writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most prepared:</strong> Encouraging thinking—deep thinking and criticism of the world around us</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Least prepared:</strong> Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even if there are certain restraints on my lesson planning, it gives me time to focus specifically on classroom management, which I think I definitely need. This isn’t to say that I relinquish my subversive teaching duties, it just means that I’ll have to get a little more creative.

In methods coursework, Marilyn had been considered one of the more creative PSTs. Her professor repeatedly praised her work as creative, and Marilyn said in an interview that “creativity” was one of three words she would use to summarize her teacher-education program. Yet the first author’s field-notes after observing her teach in her CMO classroom tell a different story: “In this lesson, there appeared to be little room for creativity on behalf of the teacher or the students, and I had difficulty understanding the relevance of the text being read to the students.” These notes contrasted with notes the first author took the semester before, after observing a lesson Marilyn taught in a part-time field placement at a public middle school near the university. These differences, typical for the three PSTs, suggest that just as they were taking up the languages of their school environments, so were they also taking up teaching practices.

6.3.3. Management and relationships
All three PSTs worked in CMOs with strict, standardized management practices, and all three talked in seminar meetings about struggles they faced building student relationships. These struggles were different from challenges other PSTs identified. Cecilia, Grace, and Marilyn focused on how school-management policies strained their student relationships. Marilyn, for example, focused her inquiry project on a student she said was frequently in trouble. Often, Marilyn said she would have negative interactions with the student when trying to enforce the school’s policy requiring silence in hallways. Marilyn told other cohort members she had decided to step back and let other teachers discipline the student, so she would not have to get involved. Later, in an interview, she explained: “There was so much management involved when we weren’t instructing. I just felt like it created so many battles with kids that we didn’t need to have … Just so many battles and creating negative vibes between people...” In this aspect, Marilyn had seemed to reach a decision, that she simply would avoid enforcing the school’s policy. In other areas, Marilyn seemed more conflicted. Once while attending the seminar face-to-face, Marilyn broke into tears during a small-group discussion about fostering collaborative work among students (see Figure 5).

In Figure 5 transcript, Marilyn and her peers discuss her statement that groupwork “probably won’t be able to happen” in her placement. At first, Lynn asks a clarifying question but then expresses herself, “Oh, I see” and offers an explanation. It is unclear, however, if Lynn really does understand. Marilyn affirms Lynn’s explanation in line 4 despite that Marilyn never was able to teach the unit she had planned, as Lynn suggested in line 2. This might indicate another disconnect between peers, though data here are unclear. Lynn then asks about the CMO’s “turn and talk” practice of partnering students for discussion, suggesting it as an alternative to groupwork that Marilyn can employ. Lynn justifies this suggestion, arguing it is something the mentor teacher cannot reject, but Marilyn directly disagrees, stating the mentor would object. In this portion of the conversation, it is the mentor, rather than the greater CMO environment, who is blamed for not allowing Marilyn to use groupwork.

This implication leads directly to Lynn’s questioning of Marilyn about what it is like for Marilyn to work with the mentor. Marilyn apparently starts to characterize the relationship as awkward before Samantha asks if Marilyn feels free to interject herself in the relationship. Marilyn says she does not, and Samantha, with the question “Are you having an ok time?” apparently broadens the conversation, beyond the mentor relationship toward discussion of the placement more generally. Marilyn says it’s discouraging and begins crying, to which others, including the first author, offer words of support, suggesting alliance with Marilyn in that others had also been vulnerable and cried. It is possible, however, that for Marilyn, who was alone in this group in having worked at a CMO, these words of apparently intended solidarity might actually have highlighted differences between her peers’
placements and her own. Marilyn then offers that she feels like she’s doing the wrong thing. She again suggests conflict with the mentor “she,” though Marilyn does not complete the sentence before saying, “It’s just really not me,” a statement which echoes Cecilia’s claims above that she felt like “an actor.” Lynn relates this comment back to what she has heard about the CMO’s management policies, describing them, as Cecilia previously did in the seminar, as “militant” and as incongruent with Marilyn’s “sweet” personality. In her next turn, she emphasizes this contrast, claiming not only that CMO policies conflict with the teacher-education program’s philosophies but with Marilyn’s own “personal entity.” Marilyn concludes with more military-related language, that the situation feels like a constant battle with students.

This conversation is typical thematically of conversations the three focal PSTs had with peers but atypical in that Marilyn cried during it. Marilyn’s tears suggest this was an issue that was not only intellectually but emotionally salient for her. The conversation illustrates, too, how for Marilyn, many themes are inter-related. Here a conversation about instructional struggles implementing group-work leads to discussion of conflicts with Marilyn’s mentor and the CMO’s management principles. In this conversation, it is difficult to tease out whether Marilyn’s conflicts are with school practices in general or the mentor more specifically. In a sense, this might make it difficult to understand if Marilyn’s situation in a CMO is different than any PST’s placement in a classroom where there is conflict with a mentor teacher. But elsewhere data suggest struggles went farther than with mentors alone. Both Marilyn and Cecilia identify conflicts with administrators as well, as in the example above in which Marilyn mentions the assistant principal who told her she would not be allowed to teach a full load. Cecilia said, too, she received negative feedback from a principal when she failed to enforce school policies, such as mandatory silent reading time. This interaction with principals was atypical of PSTs within the larger cohort. While others talked about conflicts with mentors, none to our knowledge received corrective feedback from principals.

7. Discussion
In this study, we have begun needed work toward filling a gap in literature, considering how PSTs experience their field placements, particularly in diverse and urban environments (Grant & Gibson, 2011). We considered how PSTs’ Discourse about student-teaching placements in CMO schools constructed disconnects between charter-school environments and their teacher-education program. We discuss our findings here in light of these disconnects to suggest necessary characteristics of effective student-teaching placements in CMOs. As Anderson and Stillman (2012) have suggested the murky nature of studying PSTs’ field placements, sometimes revealing both positive and negative outcomes, we also recognize that our students’ Discourse indicates these characteristics were not always satisfied in their placements.

7.1. PSTs must perceive that others in their schools value their learning
Through this project we have examined Discourse of three PSTs—Cecilia, Grace, and Marilyn—concerning distance placements in urban CMO schools while completing a traditional teacher-education program in a small university town. This study uses as a theoretical framework, Gee’s (2011a, 2011b) idea that people build connections or disconnections through Discourse. All three PSTs in our study discussed ways their expectations were unmet in placements. Cecilia said she was surprised by how teachers turned “militant” when students were present and said that by assuming such a persona, she felt like “an actor.” Grace said that though she had learned to work well with others at her school and planned to continue teaching there after her placement, she was disappointed that she did not have greater freedom to employ the approaches to language and literacy instruction she was learning in her teacher-education program. And Marilyn discussed being told her mentor and an administrator “couldn’t sacrifice student learning” for her practice. This message appeared to be a direct conflict between Marilyn’s expectation to learn and a school environment that pronounced instead students’ learning as a competing rather than shared objective. Given that our very role is as teacher educators, we must closely examine the opportunities CMOs provide our PSTs for practicing teaching. Because our study largely focused on PSTs’ Discourse rather than Discourse within their school environments, further research is necessary to investigate perspectives CMO teachers and
administrators have toward PSTs. We base the rest of our discussion on the idea that CMOs can offer valuable experiences for PSTs to work in diverse settings only in contexts where PSTs feel that CMO teachers and administrators are willing to invest in PSTs' learning.

7.2. PSTs in cohorts must identify as members of a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991)

As they went through their placements, these PSTs demonstrated aspects of both geographical and experiential distance from peers. Geographically, PSTs were not present in cohort meetings. They were not present at all for informal interaction times, which might have been just as important as formal discussions for developing community. We watched as other PSTs used snack-breaks and time before and after class to celebrate successes or commiserate about challenges they were mutually experiencing. For formal discussions, focal PSTs were present virtually, through a frequently spotty Internet connection that might have affected their contributions in ways we will never know.

Experientially, other cohort members often did not appear to understand CMOs’ unique contexts, structures, or jargon. Though they asked focal PSTs questions, these questions appeared to simultaneously interrupt and derail focal PSTs’ discussions of their experiences and possibly caused focal PSTs to feel more separated from other cohort members. In retrospect, we as teacher educators might have put into place better systems for fostering community among the cohort, even with members at geographical distances and in various contexts. We might have, for instance, created opportunities specifically for focal PSTs to explain their contexts to peers, possibly through offering “virtual” tours or visits to their classrooms. We could have invited CMO mentors or administrators to speak at cohort meetings. We could have established “buddy” relationships between focal PSTs and peers, simulating informal sharing among cohort members at meetings. We did not do this because,
as we will explain below, we ourselves did not yet understand the CMO contexts and the disconnects our PSTs would experience.

7.3. PSTs must have support in confronting paradoxes they face between theory and practice

PSTs expressed that they faced discontinuity between differing value systems of the teacher-education program and their schools. Their preparation program taught them to approach language and literacy with innovation and appeal to students’ interests, while their schools taught that mandatory reading practice time and working on skills needed to boost test scores was most essential. Their methods courses taught them to be “subversive” while their schools, they said, asked them to be like “robots.” While their course professors told them the importance of building strong student relationships, their schools asked them to enforce strict discipline policies, requiring students to stay silent in hallways and wear different shirts or stickers as punishments. Focal PSTs sat through seminar discussions about instructional approaches such as groupwork, even as they understood in their schools that groupwork was not permitted.

8. Conclusions

It is possible to read these findings and to question how the PSTs’ stories are different from those of any PST first encountering school-based learning through student-teaching placements. Certainly, literature has long argued PSTs must develop new teaching personas that might feel like acting (Harris, 1977) or as if they are wearing masks, as another cohort member expressed (Salerno & Kibler, 2014). Literature, too, holds that PSTs often experience tensions when they enter classrooms between values they hold themselves, values they have been taught in preparation programs, and values espoused in actual schools (Walkington, 2005). For our focal PSTs, all these factors are important.

But we believe rifts these PSTs faced between their teacher-education program and schools were more exaggerated than for other cohort members. Not only were these PSTs experiencing the tremendous socializing pressures from school and university that PSTs generally face in student-teaching, they were also precariously positioned at the intersection between two competing philosophies in teacher education today. Our literature review above indicates some of the many ways that established professionals are currently debating the differing practices between traditional teacher education and CMOs’ “no excuses” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003) learning philosophies and strong ties to alternative-licensure programs. These PSTs were trying to make sense of these larger philosophical differences about what teaching and teacher education should be, while simultaneously just beginning to learn basic teaching skills. Given such overwhelming pressures and given the importance of helping PSTs to bridge theory and practice (Milner, 2006), it is perhaps not surprising that Cecilia recommended PSTs never again be placed with her CMO, that Grace regretted not having opportunities to plan instructional units, and that Marilyn considered leaving teaching altogether.

With such difficult results, we ourselves have had to look long and hard at our own practices regarding placing these PSTs in CMOs. What Cecilia, Grace, and Marilyn encountered was not an optimal school-based context, but we believe that it was so, not necessarily because of the setting but because of our inexperience with it. When these PSTs entered their classrooms, for a variety of reasons, we were ill-informed and unprepared about the experiences they would have. In many ways, we as supervisors were like these PSTs’ peers, learning about their environments from reports they brought to us and requiring much contextual explanation to understand their experiences.

We needed to have better understood their CMO environments ourselves so that we could develop appropriate instruction. That instruction might have included allowing PSTs to identify conflicts they found in their school and training environments and discuss them directly with the cohort. With our lack of preparation, these discussions seemed to happen tangentially, with focal PSTs only able to participate by saying why they could not implement practices in their contexts. For example, in the small-group discussion above, the “assigned topic” was about groupwork, but Marilyn appeared to
interrupt the conversation by saying groupwork did not happen in her placement. In a model where
discussion is about differences directly, we would invite PSTs to explore contrasts they see between
their teacher-education learnings and their placements. This invitation would extend to all cohort
members but might particularly help PSTs in placements such as CMOs, where philosophies seemed
particularly divergent.

Discussions would certainly need to be based in literature, but rather than including literature on
a pre-determined syllabus, readings might include different voices related to topical areas PSTs
identify as greatest sources of conflict. Such open discussion could be framed in the type of collabo-
rative inquiry approach Hollins (2011) suggests, where “knowledge in practice” is constructed
through “dialog, inquiry, and problem solving” about “everyday classroom practices of teachers and
candidates” (p. 126). In our context, PSTs did complete inquiry projects, but projects generally fo-
cused on questions about individual students rather than on larger curricular or instructional ap-
proaches (Salerno & Kibler, 2015). We need to push PSTs toward considering larger school contexts
as inquiry topics. Additionally, our inquiry discussion included only PSTs, their professor, and supervi-
sors. Hollins’s (2011) model, however, involves collaboration across teacher-education and school
settings. Such an approach means that our rooms needs additional seats for PSTs’ mentors, admin-
istrators, and students. In the spirit of practitioner-research, we view our study as pointing to the
need for additional cycles of inquiry in which a broader group of collaborators partner with PSTs in
discussing school-based learning environments and conflicting ideologies in teacher-education
programs.

We view our study as having a particular message about school-based learning environments for
PSTs. The PSTs in our study faced an extreme form of discontinuity between their teacher-education
and their CMO settings. For us as teacher educators, and given our personal values for relationship
building, it would be easy for us to discount these placements simply because they ascribe to differ-
ent philosophies. However, the focal PSTs entered these placements because they wanted experi-
ences in urban schools and with student populations from inner-city areas. We cannot deny that
CMOs offered PSTs experiences in a unique environment that has been lauded by many as a means
for helping urban students advance. Differences of structures and philosophies are perhaps inherent
between teacher-education programs and schools; it is our role to help PSTs navigate those.

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Notes
1. Pseudonyms are used here and throughout.
2. Name omitted here and throughout.

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