



# **Partnership in the Third Space**

Creating a new learning arena in Icelandic preschool  
teacher education

Svava Björg Mörk

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a Ph.D. degree



**UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND**  
**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**



**Partnership in the Third Space**  
***Creating a new learning arena in Icelandic***  
***preschool teacher education***

Svava Björg Mörk

**Supervisors**

Professor Kari Smith, Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Dr. Arna H. Jónsdóttir, University of Iceland

**Doctoral committee**

Professor Kari Smith, Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Dr. Arna H. Jónsdóttir, University of Iceland  
Professor May Britt Postholm, Norwegian University of Science and  
Technology

**Opponents at defence**

Professor Frances Rust, University of Pennsylvania GSE  
Professor Liv Torunn Grindheim, Western Norway University of Applied  
Sciences

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a Ph.D. degree

Faculty of Education and Pedagogy  
School of Education, University of Iceland  
January 2022

Partnership in the Third Space: Creating a new learning arena in Icelandic preschool teacher education

A thesis for a Ph.D./Ed.D. degree in Education Studies

© 2022, Svava Björg Mörk

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-9935-9625-2-2

Printed at: Háskólaprent ehf.

Reykjavík, Iceland, 2022

## **Abstract**

The project is an empirical qualitative research that aims to explore the concept of the “third space” as a collaborative learning arena with partners in Icelandic preschool teacher education. The explicit focus is preschool teacher education, specifically the connection between theory and practice during field practice and how the third space can be used to link theory and practice. The overall research question is: “How can ‘the Third Space’ become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic teacher education?” Thus, emphasis was on the issues of importance in developing the third space—that is, partnership in preschool teacher education, preschool student teachers’ learning during their field practice, and communication and division of labor among actors. To achieve this goal, four studies were conducted, presented in four articles: Article I, Historical perspective of the third space in Icelandic preschool teacher education; Article II, University-preschool collaboration in preschool student teacher education in Iceland; Article III, Between a rock and a hard place: The importance of education and professional development of preschool student teachers in field practice; and Article IV, During the field practice, their professionalism increases: Collaboration in the practicum.

The contribution of the project is threefold. First, the project is intended to contribute to the theoretical knowledge regarding third space and partnership in preschool teacher education, an issue that has not been at the forefront in preschool teacher education studies. Second, as the context of the project is Iceland, it contributes to the Icelandic and international discourse on preschool teacher education and policy. The dissertation explores partnership in preschool teacher education and how stakeholders perceive the collaboration. The four studies contribute to knowledge about the university-preschool partnership and how it affects student teachers’ learning. Third, the intention of the project is to contribute to professionalism in preschool teacher education.

Sociocultural constructivism is the epistemological framework for this project. In cultural and social contexts, by interacting, asking questions, and discussing issues with each other, individuals construct meanings of situations (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Edwards, 2005). The project is framed by Engeström’s theory of expansive learning (2015) and theory

about the third space (Bhabha, 1990; Zeichner, 2010) and partnership (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016).

The methodology is qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018) using triangulated data collection. To get an in-depth understanding of the issue and to ensure triangulation, data were collected from different sources, in three different ways using multiple theories in data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The findings from the four studies provide an answer to the overall question “How can ‘the Third Space’ become a meaningful learning arena in preschool teacher education?” The findings indicate that true partnership in the preschool teacher education in Iceland is scarce, and that the partnership is more separated than collaborative. The main findings show that participants found it important to build good partnerships, involve more stakeholders, and strengthen the collaboration between the field and the universities, with the overall goal of ensuring professionalism in the early childhood sector. They saw this as an important factor in creating a shared learning platform that held innovation, vitality, and flexibility—all fundamental steps to forming true partnership. Participants also discussed that lack of communication and discussions seemed to hinder the collaboration and decreases opportunities to develop true partnership.

## Ágrip

### Samstarf í þriðja svæðinu: Nýr námsvettvangur í leikskólakennaranámi á Íslandi

Þetta verkefni er empirísk eigindleg rannsókn sem miðar að því að kanna hugtakið “þriðja svæðið” sem sameiginlegan námsvettvang þeirra sem koma að menntun leikskólakennara á Íslandi. Aðaláhersla er á menntun leikskólakennara, sér í lagi tengslin milli fræða og starfs á vettvangi og hvernig þriðja svæðið getur verið hlekkurinn sem tengir saman fræði og starf. Yfir rannsóknarspurningin er: “Hvernig getur “þriðja svæðið” orðið þýðingarmikill námsvettvangur í kennaramenntun á Íslandi?” Af þeim sökum var áherslan á mikilvæga þætti í þróun þriðja svæðisins - það er, samstarf í menntun leikskólakennara, nám leikskólakennara nema í vettvangsnámi og samskipti og verkaskiptingu hagsmunaaðila.

Til að ná þessu markmiði voru fjórar rannsóknir gerðar, kynntar í fjórum greinum: Grein I, Þriðja svæðið í menntun leikskólakennara á Íslandi í sagnfræðilegu ljósi; Grein II, Samstarf um vettvangsnám leikskólakennaranema; Grein III, Á milli steins og sleggju: Mikilvægi menntunar og fagþróunar leikskólakennaranema í vettvangsnámi; Grein IV, „Í gegnum vettvangsnámið þá efla þeir fagmennsku sína“: Samstarf um vettvangsnám leikskólakennaranema.

Framlag þessa verkefnis er þríþætt. Í fyrsta lagi, er verkefninu ætlað að auka fræðilega þekkingu er varðar þriðja svæðið og samstarf í menntun leikskólakennara, málefni sem hefur ekki verið framarlega í rannsóknum á menntun leikskólakennara. Í öðru lagi, þar sem verkefnið er unnið á Íslandi, stuðlar það að bæði íslenskri og alþjóðlegri orðræðu um menntun leikskólakennara og menntastefnu. Doktorsritgerðin kannar samvinnu í menntun leikskólakennara og hvaða skilning hluthafar leggja í samstarfið. Rannsóknirnar fjórar bæta við þekkingu hvað varðar samstarf háskóla og leikskóla og hvaða áhrif það hefur á nám kennaranema. Í þriðja lagi, er tilgangur verkefnisins að auka fagleika innan menntunar leikskólakennara.

Þekkingafræðilegur rammi verkefnisins er félags- og menningarleg mótunarhyggja. Einstaklingar gefa aðstæðum merkingu með samskiptum, spurningum og umræðu málefna í menningarlegu og félagslegu samhengi (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Edwards, 2005). Umgerð verkefnisins er

kenning Engeströms um útvíkkað nám (2015) og kenningu um þriðja svæðið (Bhabha, 1990; Zeichner, 2010) og samstarf (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016).

Aðferðafræðin er eiginleg rannsókn (Creswell & Poth, 2018) með margþættri gagnaöflun. Til að ná dýpri skilningi á málefnum og til að tryggja margþætta sýn á gögnin, var gögnum safnað úr mismunandi heimildum, á þrjá mismunandi vegu með fjölda kenninga til gagnagreiningar (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Niðurstöðurnar úr þessum fjórum rannsóknum gefa svör við aðalspurningunni “Hvernig getur “þriðja svæðið” orðið þýðingarmikill námsvettvangur í leikskólakennaramenntun á Íslandi?” Niðurstöðurnar gefa til kynna að skortur sé á raunverulegu samstarfi í menntun leikskólakennara, og að það samstarf sem fyrir er sé meira aðskilið en sameiginlegt átak. Helstu niðurstöður sýna að þátttakendur töldu það mikilvægt að móta gott samstarf, fá fleiri aðila í samstarfið og styrkja samvinnu milli vettvangs og háskóla þar sem yfirmarkmið er að tryggja fagleika í leikskólastarfi. Þeir sáu þetta sem mikilvægan lið í að skapa sameiginlegan námsvettvang sem innihéldi nýsköpun, kraft og sveigjanleika - en allt þetta eru grundvallaratriði í myndun raunverulegs samstarfs. Þátttakendur ræddu einnig að skortur á samskiptum og umræðum virtist hindra samstarfið og fækka tækifærum til að þróa raunverulegt samstarf.



## Table of contents

Abstract .....	iii
Ágrip .....	v
Table of contents.....	vii
List of figures .....	x
List of tables .....	x
List of articles .....	xi
Acknowledgments.....	xii
1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Partnership in preschool teacher education.....	1
1.2 The purpose of the research .....	3
1.2.1 Aim and research question.....	4
1.3 Design of the thesis .....	5
2 Preschool teacher education in Iceland: Collaboration with the practice field.....	7
2.1 The history and development of preschool teacher education in Iceland.....	7
2.2 Today's challenges in preschool teacher education in Iceland .....	11
2.3 Summary .....	12
3 Theoretical and methodological framework of the research .....	13
3.1 Sociocultural constructivism .....	14
3.2 Engeström's activity system.....	15
3.2.1 Expansive learning theory .....	18
3.3 The third space .....	20
3.3.1 The third space in teacher education .....	20
3.3.2 Boundary crossing .....	22
3.3.3 Field practice in preschool teacher education .....	23
3.4 Partnership in preschool teacher education.....	24
3.4.1 Research on qualities of true partnership .....	25
3.5 Using the theory in my own learning expansion.....	26
3.5.1 Starting point .....	26

3.5.2 Engeström’s learning cycle .....	27
3.6 Summary.....	33
4 Relevant literature .....	35
4.1 Partnership in the third space .....	35
4.1.1 Boundary crossing.....	37
4.1.2 Leadership in the creation of the third space.....	39
4.1.3 Professional development during the practice period .....	40
4.2 Summary of existing knowledge and gaps .....	44
4.3 Research question .....	45
5 Methodology.....	47
5.1 The research paradigm .....	47
5.1.1 Participants .....	48
5.2 Research methods .....	50
5.2.1 Data gathering .....	50
5.3 Data analysis.....	52
5.3.1 Activity system as a frame for analysis.....	53
5.3.2 Historical analysis.....	53
5.3.3 Descriptive coding.....	53
5.3.4 Thematic analysis.....	54
5.4 Ethical issues.....	54
5.5 Trustworthiness of the research .....	55
5.6 Summary.....	57
6 Findings .....	59
6.1 Four sub-studies .....	59
6.1.1 Sub-study 1 .....	60
6.1.2 Sub-study 2 .....	62
6.1.3 Sub-study 3 .....	63
6.1.4 Sub-study 4 .....	65
6.1.5 Synthesis of the four sub-studies .....	66
7 Discussion.....	69
7.1 Moving from a separated to a cooperative partnership.....	69
7.2 Moving across boundaries in the creation of the third space.....	71
7.3 Moving from partially shared object to expansion in the learning	72

7.4 Partnership in the third space .....	75
7.5 Summary .....	77
8 Conclusions .....	79
8.1 Intended contribution of the research.....	79
8.2 Limitations of the research.....	80
8.3 Further research.....	81
8.4 Closing words .....	81
9 Epilogue.....	83
9.1 The context of the Icelandic educational system in preschool teacher education .....	83
9.1.1 Practicum .....	84
9.1.2 Participants and their relation to the universities .....	86
9.2 Activity system as an analyzing tool.....	87
9.2.1 Student teachers.....	88
9.2.2 Preschool-based mentors .....	91
9.2.3 University teachers .....	93
9.2.4 Preschool principals .....	95
9.2.5 Policymakers .....	98
9.2.6 Summary .....	100
9.3 Suggested third spaces.....	101
9.3.1 Locating the partnership.....	101
9.3.2 True partnership model .....	103
9.3.3 Crossing boundaries.....	104
9.4 Summary .....	106
References.....	107
Appendices.....	120

## List of figures

Figure 1 Engeström’s activity system (Engeström, 2001 p. 136) .....	16
Figure 2 Cycle of expansive learning (Engeström & Sannino, 2010).....	18
Figure 3 Components of the third space (Moje et al., 2004, pp. 43– 44). .....	21
Figure 4 Typical school-university relationship in education (Smith, 2016, p. 28). .....	24
Figure 5 Pillars of the third space.....	27
Figure 6 Two systems in preschool teacher education .....	28
Figure 7 Meeting points between activity systems.....	30
Figure 8 Preparing for the unknown .....	31
Figure 9 Model for learning dialogues in teacher education partnership ( <i>Adapted from Lillejord &amp; Børte, 2016, p. 559</i> ) .....	38
Figure 10 True partnership in the third space.....	75

## List of tables

Table 1. Qualities of partnership in teacher education (adapted from Halvorsen 2014, p. 58-69).....	26
Table 2. Inclusion criteria for focus group participants .....	49
Table 3. Mixed qualitative research methods.....	59
Table 4. Expansions of objects in all three dimensions.....	74
Table 5 Courses taught at the universities with connection to practicum 2016–2017 .....	85
Table 6 Courses taught at the universities with connection to practicum 2021-2022 .....	86
Table 7 Participants situated relative to the universities.....	87

## List of articles

This thesis is based upon the following articles:

**Article I:** Mörk, S. B. (2018). Historical perspective of the third space in Icelandic preschool teacher education. In K. Smith (Ed.), *Norsk og internasjonal lærerutdanningsforskning: Hvor er vi? Hvor vil vi gå? Hva skal vi gjøre nå?* (pp. 91-107). Fagbokforlaget.

**Article II:** Mörk, S. B. (2021). University–preschool collaboration in pre-school teacher education in Iceland. *Learning Environments Research*.

**Article III:** Mörk, S. B. & Jónsdóttir, A. H. (under review). Between a rock and a hard place: The importance of education and professional development of preschool student teachers in field practice.

**Article IV:** Mörk, S. B. & Jónsdóttir, A. H. (in process). During the field practice, their professionalism increases: Collaboration in the practicum.

## Acknowledgments

My doctoral studies have now ended. Looking back, this journey tested me personally as well as professionally. The study was exciting, fun, and rewarding. I could feel that I was growing and that my mind was being opened. Nonetheless, there were also valleys, times in which I had a difficult time seeing and believing that this would ever end. While I sometimes felt that the valleys were deep, there was learning during these times too, learning that, although foggy, was still there. Even though I did not always feel the change, the transformation of thought and knowledge during both the studies and the valleys was real. However, it was not real until I managed, with help from my supervisors, to step up from the valley. When that happened, I felt lightness, hope, and anticipation alongside the realization that something was happening now. When one comes out of that valley, I experienced new thinking and new knowledge. Indubitably, the importance of good, encouraging, critical, and strong guidance during doctoral studies is imperative. With much gratitude, I thank my doctoral committee for their support, challenging questions, and comments. You truly helped me to grow. I would especially like to thank my supervisor, Kari Smith, for knowing when to push me in the right direction, when I should step back, and when to remind me to be humble! Thanks to my co-supervisor, Arna H. Jónsdóttir, your support has been valuable, and thank you for reminding me to be professional! May Britt Postholm, a third member of the committee, I thank you for your constructive responses.

As a doctoral student, you experience rejection, and sometimes despair, when you get a rejected article back from mentors or critics, and everything on the page is red. At times, I have closed the document and not had the mental stamina to open it again for some time. However, when I did open it and I reminded myself that this was not personal, the guidance was there to support me to become a better and more critical researcher, and the courage and boldness emerged to give me the stamina to work, fix, and refine.

At times, I wondered what is wrong with me to go willingly through this mental exertion. My former colleagues at the School of Education were there for me during these ups and down and other doctoral students who were on the same path as me. My dear friend Michelle Sonia Horne, who

has been a rock during this process, always prepared to lend a helping hand, to help me translate, to listen, discuss the process, and to provide critical feedback.

Last, but not least, I thank my family for their support and encouragement, my children, and grandchildren, Valey Ýr, Páll Herbert, Ólavía Steinunn, Aníka Bríet, and Ólivía Styff, know that you are loved and thank you for believing in me. My beloved husband, Jóhann Kristmundsson, thank you for bearing with me while I have been preoccupied, for your patient support, and for always being there. As a Christian, I also want to thank my Lord Jesus Christ; it has been invaluable to be able to hold on to my faith with prayer and meditation.

I feel grateful for this opportunity and to be able to see things in a new light. My world of experience has expanded, and I truly hope that this new knowledge will help me to become a better teacher, researcher, and scholar.

*“Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.”*

Albus Dumbledore (J.K. Rowling)





# 1 Introduction

This is an empirical research project that aims to explore the concept of “the third space” as a collaborative learning arena with initial stakeholders in Icelandic preschool teacher education. To get a better picture if there was third space in preschool teacher education in Iceland, I needed to investigate how it presented itself in the past and whether it is currently present. The specific focus is on partnership in preschool teacher education, specifically the connection between theory and practice during field practice, and how the third space can be used to link theory and practice. The overall research question of the project is: “How can the ‘Third Space’ become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic teacher education?” Four studies were conducted with various stakeholders in early childhood education in Iceland to answer the overall question.

## 1.1 Partnership in preschool teacher education

Strong partnerships between stakeholders in teacher education can empower student teachers and influence their professional development. Research indicates that there is a disconnect between the theory students learn and their practical applications in the field and how this affects students’ teaching practice (Karlsson Lohmander, 2015; Lewis, 2012; Zeichner, 2010). Preschool teacher education in Iceland began in 1946 with a focus on ensuring the welfare of children (Guðmundsson, 1949). Education has changed since then, both in Iceland and on an international level, which has influenced the collaboration between practitioners and universities. Internationally and in Iceland, there has been an increased practical component in teacher education in general and in Icelandic preschool teacher education. A close look at the relationship between the practice field and departments of education in universities reveals that a disconnection has occurred between those who educate student teachers during their practical education (Jónsdóttir, 2015; Lillejord & Børte, 2016; Zeichner, 2010).

Research suggests that there are concerns on how teacher education prepares students for the practice field and the disconnection between theory and practice (Karlsson Lohmander, 2015; Jónsdóttir, 2015; Zeichner, 2010). The relationship between theory and practice is complicated. Theory

is often understood as being all that practice is not and is implied to be normative for practice; theory is also often understood to originate from practice (Saugstad, 2002). In teacher education, these two concepts interact and shape the student teacher and his or her ability to become a competent educator (Zeichner, 2010).

Research on the disconnection has addressed different solutions, including creating a third space, and has indicated that interventions could impact teacher education (Zeichner, 2010). Zeichner (2010) suggests that by increasing the focus on practical experience in teacher education and thereby creating a less hierarchical or even non-hierarchical interplay among actors, third spaces may become powerful learning arenas for students pursuing teacher education. In a study on educational policy changes in Sweden and implementing changes regarding the relationship between theory and practice, Karlsson Lohmander (2015) concluded that field practice is a critical part of preschool teacher education. She noted that students experience a reality gap between what is taught in the universities and workplace learning and therefore sometimes find it hard to apply theory to practice. Students felt like what was taught at the university was more abstract and distant, while what they learned during their practice period was more concrete and imitated. Therefore, they experienced difficulties in bringing these two together (Karlsson Lohmander, 2015). This finding coincides with Jónsdóttir's (2015) observation of a disconnection between universities and the field; both signal a need to change the structure of field practice in preschool teacher education in Iceland. Jónsdóttir (2015) states that the creation of a third space is necessary if preschool teacher education in Iceland is to be effective. She concludes that for education to be successful, the field practice should focus on reflection based on research and knowledge. Given this scenario in the field of teacher education in Iceland, this project examines stakeholders' initial views on partnership in early childhood teacher education by investigating how they perceive the partnership between preschools and universities, as well as what they deem most important therein. The project also examines the interaction between the practice field and the universities and how the partnerships affect students as they gain practical experience in the field.

## 1.2 The purpose of the research

To the best of my knowledge, there have been no studies about university-preschool partnership or mentoring in preschool teacher education in Iceland. There are also scarce studies internationally about university-preschool partnership (Halvorsen, 2014; Quinn, 2017). After reading Jónsdóttir's (2015) article where she ponders if there is a third space in preschool teacher education in Iceland, I realized that there was a need to investigate what could be done to improve preschool teacher education, with a focus on preschool-university partnership. To contribute to existing knowledge, I was interested in finding out how stakeholders think and collaborate in subjects like field practice that demand collaboration between actors. Thus, I started by mapping the collaboration between stakeholders since the beginning of preschool teacher education in Iceland, starting in 1946. In this research, the third space is suggested as a way to contribute to the learning of all stakeholders involved. By implementing new connections between stakeholders, preschool teacher education can become empowered with dialogue, learning, and reflection. I have a personal interest in this topic, as I used to work as a preschool teacher and a preschool principal. I also have experience with field practice during my own study as a preschool student teacher. However, after I started working at the university, where students had a short period of field practice in one of the courses I taught, I started to think of ways to improve the partnership between the university and the practice field. I wanted to do this because I felt a distance between me and other non-student actors during the field practice. Therefore, I wanted to look further into what I, a university teacher, could do to strengthen the connection. There, the research question began, asking how a third space could become a learning arena in preschool teacher education.

All stakeholders are working toward the same goal: preparing and educating preschool teachers to become competent, caring, and effective educators. By developing a shared vision and similar goals and creating a strong relationship between the university and the practice field, preschool teacher education in Iceland is likely to improve (Jónsdóttir, 2015). The current research will contribute new knowledge that is relevant to policymakers, teacher educators, and the practice field.

The theoretical approach behind this project is based on literature pertaining to Engeström's (2015) expansive learning cycle and activity system, the third space (Bhabha, 1990), partnership in teacher education (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016), mentoring (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Smith,

2015), and preschool teacher education during the practice period (Hennum & Østrem, 2016; Røys, 2017). Sociocultural epistemology is interwoven throughout the text, as it is a useful guide to the overall research approach.

### **1.2.1 Aim and research question**

The overall aim is to examine how collaboration between various actors (preschool teacher students, mentors, university teachers, and preschool principals) in preschool teacher education can be improved by developing and transforming university and preschool partnership with the emphasis on the third space. The research targets ways to develop and strengthen the third space by uniting the practical knowledge of work-based educators (mentors) and the academic knowledge of university-based educators (university teachers), focusing on preschool teacher student's education. The research is an empirical qualitative study using a multimethod approach to answer the overall research question: "How can the 'Third Space' become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic preschool teacher education?"

The first study is a historical document analysis to help understand the development of preschool teacher education in Iceland and the connection to the practice field. Understanding the history of that development serves to clarify the present situation regarding preschool teacher education in Iceland. Looking into theory and practice in education (Zeichner, 2010), especially the construction of a third space (Bhabha, 1990), a collaborative space shared by preschools and universities where dialogue and partnership play key roles.

The second study uses focus group interviews to gather information regarding the views of initial stakeholders (preschool teacher students, mentors, university teachers, and preschool principals) regarding the partnership between preschools and universities in Iceland and to gather information about current meeting points between stakeholders. This study is focused on the theory of partnership in teacher education (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010).

The third study is an independent extension of Study 2, where focus groups were used to gather stakeholders' (in this study, I used data from preschool student teachers, mentors, and preschool principals) perspectives on the collaboration between universities and preschools in early childhood teacher education in Iceland. This study is focused on

professional rhetoric (Hennum & Østrem, 2016) and theories of mentoring (Røys, 2017; Smith, 2015).

The fourth study uses individual interviews (with politicians, preschool teachers with mentoring education, and university teachers with power and/or influence) to gather other stakeholders' perspectives regarding the place of the practical of the education. This study is focused on partnership (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016) and the third space in teacher education (Bhabha, 1990; Zeichner, 2010).

### **1.3 Design of the thesis**

The thesis consists of nine chapters. In Chapter 2, I describe the history and development of preschool teacher education in Iceland with a focus on the practical education and collaboration with the practice field. In Chapter 3, I explain the theoretical and methodological framework I find relevant to the study. Chapter 3.5 presents the research process and how I used Engeström's (2015) expansive learning cycle as a study method. Chapter 4 gives an overview of existing knowledge from previous research on the issue of third space, partnership in teacher education, and mentoring. Chapter 5 discusses the research design, perspectives, and ethical considerations. Chapter 6 describes the four studies this thesis builds on, presented as two book chapters and two peer-reviewed articles. This chapter also gives an overview of overall findings from the four studies and the main themes that arise. In Chapter 7, I discuss the findings in relation to the theoretical and methodological background. The findings are also discussed in relation to prior knowledge on the issue and what these findings can mean for preschool teacher education. In Chapter 8, I present what conclusions can be drawn from the study, as well as suggestions for implementation and future research. Last, I have added an Epilogue where I further explain the Icelandic context in preschool teacher education, I also present boundary objects found in the project ending with suggesting activities that can be used as a third space in preschool teacher education.



## **2 Preschool teacher education in Iceland: Collaboration with the practice field**

Preschool teacher education in Iceland was initiated in 1946 with the welfare of children in mind. Since that time, education has changed, both in Iceland and around the world, as has collaboration between practitioners and universities. At their inception, preschools responded to a social need by providing a service to the community. Because preschools are constructed by society, they continue to meet social needs and evolve. Today, however, preschools are far more than a service; they are spaces designed to allow children to be social actors in their own lives (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011).

Preschools are the first level of the educational system in Iceland (Preschool Act No. 90, 2008). Municipalities operate most of the preschools, but some are charter or private schools. Children can attend preschool from 18 months to six years of age, but when they start depends on the municipalities. Early childhood education and preschool teacher education in Iceland are parallel to their counterparts in other Nordic countries in that they follow a model based on humanistic and child-centered values (Einarsdóttir, 2011). During the 1970s and 1980s, Nordic countries invested in childcare so parents could balance their work and family lives (Einarsdóttir, 2011; Karila, 2017).

### **2.1 The history and development of preschool teacher education in Iceland**

Preschool teacher education in Iceland began with pioneers who focused on the welfare and cognitive development of children in Reykjavík; they sought to create an organization that would focus on nurturing those values (Guðmundsson, 1949). Sumargjöf, an alliance established in 1924, marked the beginning of the evolution of Icelandic preschools and would ultimately lead to the development of preschool teacher education in Iceland (Guðmundsson, 1949; Sigurðardóttir, 1998). In 1906, the first nursery school for children ages 3-18 months opened in Iceland. In 1924, a Fröbel kindergarten was established, and in 1932, Sumargjöf founded its first preschool (Guðmundsson, 1949).

Initially, educators who had received preschool teacher education had mainly studied in the Nordic countries. It was not until 1946 that the women-only preschool teacher college Uppeldisskóli Sumargjafar (later, Fósturskóli Sumargjafar) was founded in Iceland. During that year, only three educated preschool teachers were working for Sumargjöf (Guðmundsson, 1949). The connection between the field and academia was intense, because some of the young women worked, studied, and lived at the preschool during their studies (Guðmundsson, 1949; Jónsdóttir, 2004; Sigurðardóttir, 1998). Until 1964, Valborg Sigurðardóttir, the first principal involved in preschool teacher education (Jónsson & Helgadóttir, 2010), was the primary contact between the college and the preschools. She met with future teachers twice a week as they performed their field practice. Students were paid during their field practice, partly due to the lack of educated teachers (Sigurðardóttir, 1998).

In 1976, student teachers entered preschools as students rather than as paid workers. The pedagogical and educational philosophy of the program stemmed from Dewey's pragmatic approach, while Gesell's maturational theory of developmental psychology (Sigurðardóttir, 1998) evolved as a progressive movement that strongly influenced both field practice and theoretical learning. The first year of formal education was 18 months long, nine months of theory and nine months of field practice; in 1957, the education was expanded to two years (Einarsdóttir, 2013; Sigurðardóttir, 1998).

Until 1968, preschool teacher education was a two-year program of study; that year, a so-called preparatory school was included. The intention was for students to be prepared for further education and professional work. During the preparation, students and teachers could assess students' abilities. This arrangement had a decisive impact on the structure and future of preschool teacher education in Iceland; it came to be believed that focusing on practical education in preparation for the field was more fruitful than only providing theoretical concepts. By doing that, the school could better prepare students by providing more knowledge before they started their paid practicum or field practice. Gesell and Dewey continued to inspire the pedagogy and educational philosophy used (Sigurðardóttir, 1998).

In 1973, after 25 years of preschool teacher education in Iceland, the first law concerning the field (*Lög um Fósturskóla Íslands*, 1973) was passed (Sigurðardóttir, 1998), and the state took control of the education that occurred there. The name was changed from Fóstruskóli Sumargjafar to



Fósturskóli<sup>1</sup> when the law was passed that ensured equal access to preschool teacher education for men and women (Sigurðardóttir, 1998). In 1979, the Ministry of Education (Reglugerð, 1979) regulations stated that field practice was to be no less than one-third of the total study time. While field practice semesters were shortened, they became more frequent and were spread across the educational program (Sigurðardóttir, 1998).

During the first school year of the Fósturskóli Íslands (1973-1974), the only full-time employee was the principal, who worked with a field practice teacher hired to fill a one-year temporary position. In subsequent years, additional full-time teachers were hired, thereby allowing more students to gain admission into the program (Sigurðardóttir, 1998). The college teachers were interested in studying Dewey and practiced his philosophy of learning through theme-focused work. In 1979, changes in the curriculum began to integrate that work into theory and practice (Sigurðardóttir, 1998). During those changes, more theory was introduced which emphasized academic knowledge. This shift marked a drastic change from the idea that field practice was as important as theory, as it had been 50% of the program in the beginning; now, it was 33% of the program. Theme-focused work was a new approach to teacher training. As the school grew, more teachers were hired, and more students were accepted into the program (Sigurðardóttir, 1998).

In 1991, distance learning was established in Fósturskóli Íslands (Kristjánsdóttir, 1995; Sigurðardóttir, 1998). The need for educated preschool teachers grew, especially in rural areas. In 1990, the Minister of Education appointed a work group to prepare for distance-learning education (Kristjánsdóttir, 1995; Sigurðardóttir, 1998). By adding distance learning, Fósturskóli Íslands was able to admit more students by making coursework available to everyone, regardless of location (Sigurðardóttir, 1998). The students' course of study was now spread out over four years instead of three, and it was equally distributed between theory and field practice (with practice still being 33% of the education) as well as within local education (Sigurðardóttir, 1998). To ensure that distance learning was equal to school-based learning, and to end rumors that it was merely discounted learning, the Ministry of Education carefully examined the program and concluded that distance learning was as effective and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Fóstur* means "upbringing and fostering," but it can also mean "foetus," whereas *fóstra* (*fóstru*) means "foster mother," which was the term applied to kindergarten teachers.

professional as school-based education and that it prepared students for their future profession (Kristjánsdóttir, 1995; Sigurðardóttir, 1998).

In 1993, the Ministry of Education appointed a committee to prepare a framework for legislation that would provide guidelines for all levels of teacher education in Iceland (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 1995; Sigurðardóttir, 1998). The act addressed economic and professional concerns. The education of elementary school teachers had been conducted at the university level for 20 years, and proponents of the legislation argued that the change would provide increased independence in the field of early childhood education (Einarsdóttir, 2011). Fósturskóli Íslands and the preschool teachers' union worked to elevate preschool teacher education to the university level. In 1996, before they reached that goal, the University of Akureyri offered preschool teacher education at the university level, with teaching taking place simultaneously for on-site and distance students. Distance students participated through videoconferencing centers in various municipalities and were managed in collaboration with the university (Háskólinn á Akureyri, 2016; Jónsson & Helgadóttir, 2010; Sigurðardóttir, 1998).

In 1998, preschool teacher education at Fósturskóli Íslands was combined with the Iceland University of Education, and preschool teacher students that year graduated with a bachelor's degree (Sigurðardóttir, 1998). After preschool teacher education was shifted to the university level, fewer students applied; the university began to offer a diploma in preschool teacher education for assistants working in preschools who had at least three years of experience. They could add to that education by finishing a B.Ed. in preschool teacher education, thereby becoming preschool teachers (Einarsdóttir, 2012).

Preparation for the expansion of teacher education began around 2000 (Sigurðardóttir, 2014). In 2004, a report was presented by the Iceland University of Education, on the need to change preschool and primary teacher education, including a five-year plan that called for education to be increased and brought in line with other European countries. With an emphasis on professional development for teachers, one drawback of the plan was the shortening of field practice periods (Einarsdóttir, 2011; Kennaraháskóli Íslands, 2004). As seen in two reports from the University of Iceland (Pétursdóttir et al., 2011; Sigurðardóttir, 2014) and one from the University of Akureyri (Hreiðarsdóttir et al., 2011), field practice continued to be acknowledged as an important part of preschool teacher education, with theory being taught to prepare students for field practice. Another

change at the University of Iceland was that field practice was no longer an independent course; instead, it became part of the programmatic coursework. According to the reports, field practice empowers students in the field and helps them become aware of, and skilled at, implementing theoretical aspects of their work (Háskólinn á Akureyri, 2016; Háskóli Íslands, 2016).

Major changes occurred after preschool teacher education was shifted to the university level, especially regarding field practice. Specifically, field practice dropped from comprising one-third of the program to only 20% of the program at the University of Iceland and around 27% at the University of Akureyri (Sigurðardóttir, 1998). While more focus was placed on theory, it was apparent that the connection between theory and practice became part of the educational program (Jónsson & Helgadóttir, 2010). During the last several years, changes in preschool teacher education in Iceland have included students graduating with a master's degree (Lög um menntun og ráðningu kennara og skólastjórnenda við leikskóla, grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla no. 87/2008) and the Iceland University of Education becoming part of the University of Iceland.

## **2.2 Today's challenges in preschool teacher education in Iceland**

Since 2008, preschool teacher education in Iceland has been through five-year master's programs offered at both the University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri (Mörk, 2018). Preschool teacher education in these two universities is rather similar, where field practice comprises less than 14% of preschool student teachers' education curriculum (Háskóli Íslands, 2019, 2020; Háskólinn á Akureyri, 2019; 2020). A study of University of Iceland first-year preschool student teachers showed that 90% of students work while earning their degree, with the majority working in preschools (Björnsdóttir et al., 2019). Sixty-four percent of students who work in preschools have a contract with the municipality, which financially supports them during their studies (Jóelsdóttir, 2018). The main challenge facing Icelandic preschool teacher education today is a decrease in students entering programs in the two universities, as universities in Iceland have struggled to overcome a general disinterest in preschool teacher education.

To fulfill the education laws and appoint teachers and principals in preschools, at least 66.66% of those working in preschools are required to have preschool teacher education. According to Statistics Iceland (Statistic Iceland, 2020), in 2019, only 25% of those working in preschools in Iceland

had preschool teacher education. These numbers show the challenges Icelandic preschool teacher education faces since a lack of students affects the educational program, the number of teachers teaching in early childhood education at the university, and thus the resources to build a strong, powerful partnership. Also, the majority of the students enter the education with field experiences. Therefore, one might wonder if the reduced field practice is due to the increased experiences of the students.

Efforts have been made to strengthen the teaching profession in Iceland, including the preschool teaching profession. One change included offering a Master of Teaching (MT) and a Master of Education (M.Ed.) with the hope that those who might quit after their bachelor's degree would be encouraged to complete their master's. In the spring of 2019, stakeholders in teacher education in Iceland submitted several proposals, which included a paid internship. These paid internships were offered to preschool and primary school teacher students. This means the students' work will be assessed as 30 ECST credits during a 50% position in a school year and will be valid in both universities (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2019). Another challenge for preschool services is that the teacher's license is valid on all levels in Iceland, and many fear this could mean that preschool teachers decide to rather work at primary school level.

### **2.3 Summary**

This chapter discussed the history and development of preschool teacher education in Iceland, from its beginnings as a social welfare service in society to becoming a five-year master's degree awarded by universities. It also addressed the connections between theory and practice in different periods and how programs have evolved to their current emphasis on theory.

### 3 Theoretical and methodological framework of the research

This chapter discusses the concepts of the third space and partnership in preschool teacher education. The theoretical approach that underpins this research is based on literature pertaining to the third space and partnership in education. Sociocultural epistemology is interwoven throughout the text, as I found it to be a useful guide to the general research approach. In the last section of this chapter, I discuss how I used the theory in my own learning during the project.

The overall aim of this work was to examine the extent and quality of the partnership between the university and the practice field. This chapter presents the theories that constitute the foundation of this research, and the key concepts are discussed. The chapter is divided into sections that demonstrate how I use different theories and concepts in relation to partnership and building the third space in preschool teacher education. Several key concepts underpin this research, with a central focus given to *the third space*—a concept that has recently received increasing interest in the field of teacher education research and discussion (Moje et al., 2004; Zeichner, 2010). I conceptualize the third space in preschool teacher education as a learning arena where stakeholders meet and share their knowledge, discuss how they experience the partnership, and offer what they believe should be the main focus in the learning process. The third space represents a space where the mentor’s practical knowledge, the university teacher’s academic knowledge, and the student teacher’s learning are integrated. This space offers the opportunity to build a powerful learning arena. During my research, I discovered that there are more stakeholders in the field of preschool teacher education than just these three (I will discuss this fully in Chapter 6, where I present my findings.)

Bhabha defines *hybrid space* as a key factor in the concept of the third space, as it is in this space that hybridity occurs—that is, different elements and spaces adapting and creating something new together (Bhabha, 1990; Zeichner, 2010). *Boundary crossing* is another concept that is addressed, as it is related to the creation of the third space. In the third space, people become aware of their boundaries and are challenged to cross them; when participants cross into another’s space, collaboration develops (Akkerman

& Bakker, 2011; Martin et al., 2011; Tsui & Law, 2007). *Partnership* in teacher education is a key concept. In this type of collaboration, stakeholders mutually understand and agree that sharing goals and aiming to improve teacher education will benefit all partners. It is only through equal partnership that the collaboration essential to the third space can be nurtured (Smith, 2016). Creating a strong partnership is still one of the most promising developments in efforts to bridge theory and practice (Lewis, 2012).

An *activity system* (Engeström, 2015) can be used when two interconnected and interdependent systems have a partially shared object or are working toward the same outcome—in this case, educating student teachers (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). This system can be used to understand the context of activities in participants' lives. In this research, it was used as an overarching analysis tool when I investigated how participants interact between systems as well as within them. Therefore, the activity system provides the theoretical framework of the analysis in the overall project (Engeström, 2015). All concepts will be defined in more detail in the following sections, beginning with a definition of the *sociocultural approach* to learning, as learning is the main pillar of this research.

### **3.1 Sociocultural constructivism**

The theoretical foundation of this research is sociocultural constructivism with a focus on learning, using Engeström's (2015) expansion learning theory. In this perspective, it is understood that individuals construct meanings of situations by interacting, asking questions, and discussing issues with others (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998). Sociocultural constructivism focuses on the context and the ways in which people live and work to reveal historical and cultural effects on individuals' lives (Burr, 2015; Creswell, 2009). By extension, sociocultural constructivism holds that students are active learners and, given the opportunity, will take responsibility for their learning and knowledge. Within this dynamic, community plays a vital role in the knowledge-building process. When individuals participate as active members of society, they create a learning atmosphere and construct their own knowledge; thus, learning transforms not only the individual but also their social world (Stauffer et al., 2006). According to Dewey (2011), all communication is educative, and individuals can have heightened and changed experiences via communications. Dialogue between participants affects them and can change the way they

look at the world. Communication in society is shaped by the way people think, how they do things, their habits, and their feelings.

Human mental activity does not develop unassisted or in isolation; mental life is lived and learned by connecting with others, unfolding with cultural codes and traditions. Education does not just happen in a classroom; it is a social act that is intertwined with the community (Bruner, 1996). Social life cannot survive without communication of which standards are acceptable in society, and so the hopes, ideals, and expectations of group members are shared with and passed on to new members (Dewey, 2011). Education is a crucial part of our society; consequently, schools are a critical element in transmitting information and communication. As such, the demands on schools and preschools have become greater, and the need for professional teachers has grown (van Velzen et al., 2009).

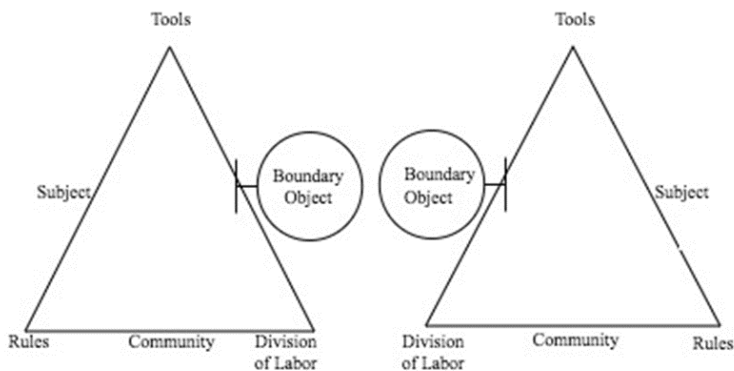
### **3.2 Engeström's activity system**

Activity theory has its roots in the work of various Russian scholars (Engeström, 2015), but in this research, the focus is on the Finnish researcher Engeström's (2015) activity system and expansive learning theory, which he developed from Vygotsky's thoughts and ideas (Postholm, 2015). Engeström's (2001) activity system can be used as a sociocultural and sociohistorical window to society when analyzing human activity in the realms of learning and working. Activity theory seeks to analyze development within practical social activities, as activities often organize our lives: Humans develop many of their skills in action, as well as their personalities and consciousness. The transformation of social conditions happens through activities, such as cultural artifacts, the creation of new forms of life, and building the self (Sannino et al., 2009).

To fully understand the activity system, it is important to look at how it has developed. There are three "generations" of activity theory. The first generation was founded on Vygotsky's idea of mediation, a "triad of subject, object and mediating artifact" (Engeström, 2015, p. xiv). According to Vygotsky's concept, the individual cannot be understood without their cultural connections, nor can society be understood without including the individuals who use and produce objects. The limitation of the first generation of activity theory was its focus on the individual (Engeström, 2015; Postholm, 2015) Leontiev developed the second generation of Vygotsky's theory by shedding light on the difference between an individual action and a collective activity—and in doing so, shifted the focus of the concept of activity to encompass "complex interrelations between the

individual subject and his or her community” (Engeström, 2015, p. xiv). The subjects are the participants, and tools represent the resources participants use to meet their goals or obtain objects. Rules can be either formal or informal regulations. The “community” refers to the group to which the participants belong, and the division of labor entails the responsibilities determined by the community. The overall goal or the object is what is acted on, and mediated actions will lead to an outcome (Yamagata-Lynch & Smaldino, 2007).

After activity theory became internationally accepted, questions of diversity and dialogue among different cultures and traditions began to arise. The third generation of activity theory was developed (Engeström, 2015) to deal with these challenges. The third generation can be used to understand networks of cooperating activity systems along with their discourses, standpoints, and opinions, and it expands the existing analysis in four directions: upward, downward, inward, and outward (Engeström, 2015). Engeström developed the activity system to “advance activity theory as an informative framework for both theory and practice” (Yamagata-Lynch & Smaldino, 2007, p. 366), proposing systems that include subjects, tools, objects, rules, community, and division of labor. Figure 1 illustrates the third-generation activity theory.



**Figure 1 Engeström’s activity system (Engeström, 2001 p. 136)**

According to Leontèv (1978), the definition of object is twofold: “first in its independent existence as subordinating to itself and transforming the activity of the subject: second, as an image of the object, as product of its property of psychological reflection that is realized as an activity of the



subject” (p. 52). An activity system is constructed around its object and in a partnership, such as teaching preschool student teachers. Objects are partly shared, meaning that the object of educating preschool student teachers in a preschool is about connecting theory to practice, while the object of educating the same students at the university is about teaching theory and reflection (Engeström, 2001; 2009). The two activity systems are interwoven, and partnership is needed (Engeström & Sannino, 2010) to complete the education (in this project) of preschool student teachers.

Looking at an activity system, there are two basic layers in the division of labor. One layer is within the system, and the other layer is between the two systems. How labor is divided between systems is based on different objects (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). The focus is on the interaction, which cannot be understood if it is analyzed outside of its environmental context. When analyzing the interaction between two systems, one needs to not only look at the activities but also at the participants. Motivating factors, or subjects’ inner states, can have an impact on how actors react regarding the object (Engeström, 2016; Leontèv, 1981). Activities can be recognized by an examination of the motive and the focus of the object (Wertsch, 1981). It is important to consider the intentions and goals, what object(s) participants are hoping to produce or obtain, and/or what results they are hoping for. It is also necessary to look at the rules and norms of the systems as well as the kind of community in which the activity occurs (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Objects, instruments, and tools enter the system from the outside and affect the way systems interact, influencing how they work (Engeström, 2016). “Needs in society evolve as inner contradictions within and between activity systems” (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013 p. 35).

In considerations of the spaces that converge in the third space (Bhabha, 1990; Soja, 1996), it is important to recognize that every system has its own history, culture, tools, and ways of communicating, which affect the development of new knowledge that combines knowledge from other spaces (Engeström, 2015). Since such development is time-consuming and can be challenging for all participants, attention should be focused on shared meanings when boundaries are crossed (Engeström, 2015; Fullan, 2016). Leontèv (1981, p. 59) stated that “the object is the true motive,” which means motivation is embedded in the overall goal of the work. Learning is shaped by society’s expectations and what the culture finds “normal” at various times and in various eras; thus, it can be diverse and can change historically (Engeström, 2015).

Activity theory is practice-based theory as well as being historical and future-oriented. Practice-based theory means it is both theoretically and concretely grounded in practice. Therefore, Sannino et al. (2009) argue that “the very nature of activity theory relies on establishing a bridge between theory and practice” (p. 7). Using this theory while researching the connection between the practice field and the universities can help me in developing a model to create a shared learning arena: the creation of the third space in preschool teacher education.

### 3.2.1 Expansive learning theory

Expansive learning theory focuses on learning processes, starting with an individual’s thinking and progressing to collective learning. The theory is based on the conflicts of “ascending from the abstract to the concrete” (Engeström, 2015, p. xx). Understanding how an object is developed requires an awareness of its historical formation through inner conflicts. The expansive cycle begins with individuals questioning their practice and progressively expands into a cooperative movement. These actions form a spiral or cycle that can be called “learning activity or expansive learning” (Engeström, 2015, p. xx) (see Figure 2)

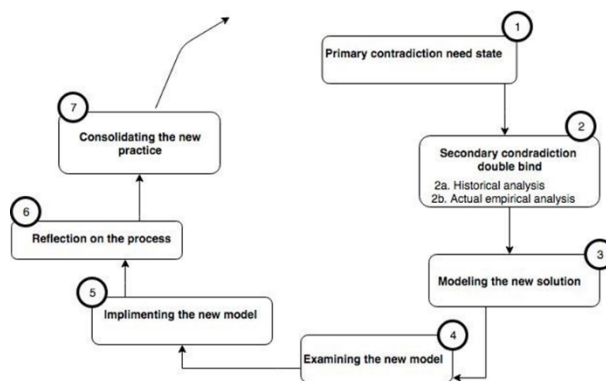


Figure 2 Cycle of expansive learning (Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

To determine whether expansive learning has taken place in the learning effort, it is necessary to assess whether the object of the activity system has expanded. Three dimensions of expansion of the object can be identified (Engeström, 2016, p. 8), and five challenges emerge from these dimensions: two from the socio-spatial, one from the temporal, and two from the

political-ethical. The dimensions and challenges are outlined in detail below.

- Socio-spatial dimension
  - Widening the cycle of people and settings included in the activity
  - Challenge 1:
    - Who is learning? – Transition from a focus on the individual to the inclusion of more learners
  - Challenge 2:
    - Where does learning happen? – Transition from a focus on the classroom to the inclusion of other settings and communities
- Temporal dimension
  - Extending the time perspective of the activity toward the future and the past
  - Challenge 3:
    - What is the timeframe of learning? – Transition from a restrictive focus on learning in lessons and curriculum to the inclusion of longer-term processes and different rhythms of learning
- Political-ethical dimension
  - Making visible and questioning the human and societal consequences of the activity
  - Challenge 4:
    - What is learned and why? – Transition from a restrictive focus on given curricular content to the inclusion of questioning and the creation of novel content by different actors
  - Challenge 5:
    - What is the societal impact of learning? – Transition from a restrictive focus on learners as acquirers and participants to the inclusion of learners as agents of change

These five challenges may be used as a guide when designing a learning arena that involves different actors from various activity systems (Engeström, 2016). I used the expansive learning theory to collect my data,

starting with the historical analysis and empirical analysis of current status. I developed my research with the model as it gave me an overview of my process. In Chapter 3.5, I present how I used these five challenges to analyze the progress of my research.

### **3.3 The third space**

Research on the disconnection between the theoretical and practical aspects of teacher education has proposed several solutions that provide an empowering learning environment for students. One proposal is the creation of a third space to be used as a learning environment. Conceptualization of the third space is supported by Bhabha's (1990) definition and views of the concept he calls "hybrid space." In short, when two cultures merge and hybridity occurs, a third or hybrid space emerges. Bhabha's (1990) definition clarified how the third space can function and the ways in which social entities can develop hybrid spaces. He also discussed the significance of communication and negotiation in hybrid spaces, and he encouraged participants to be open-minded as they learn new ways of conceiving and perceiving the world while they crossed boundaries. As participants gain a broader worldview, they become more likely to expand and rethink their principles. Bhabha (1990) also emphasized that in such shared spaces, all participants should feel equal and resist engaging in power struggles. As an extension of Bhabha's (1990) ideas, Soja's (1996) theory of the third space further contributes to an understanding of the importance of thinking differently about spaces, of understanding the past and its contexts, and of questioning the way things are and how they have developed. Soja (1996) maintained that spaces develop through social and historical interactions; they are neither solely regional nor attached to spatial entities. Using both Bhabha's (1990) and Soja's (1996) definitions of the third space and connecting to the activity system (Engeström, 2015), I investigate how the third space has progressed from the start of the preschool teacher education in Iceland and how it has developed during the decades.

#### **3.3.1 The third space in teacher education**

According to Moje et al. (2004 p. 43–44), the third space can be viewed in at least three ways: as building bridges between dialogue and knowledge; as cultivating a navigational space that allows actors to cross into different communities; and as providing a nurturing space in which conversation can bring different cultures into synchronized dialogue.



**Figure 3 Components of the third space (Moje et al., 2004, pp. 43–44).**

By uniting discourse and knowledge in the third space, preschool student teachers, university teachers, and mentors can scaffold their learning and expand their knowledge while building bridges between what they and others know, thereby generating new knowledge. Building bridges is an important aspect of the third space, as it helps participants understand how they and others experience the world. Critically, different perspectives can be remodeled to form a third space (Moje et al., 2004). In the space Habermas (1996) referred to as the public sphere, Kemmis et al. (2014) drew on his ideas and called it the communicative space. In this space, participants take communicative action while engaging in open dialogue about the concept or problem they are working on. This could be the first step in creating the third space; by consciously deciding what goal should be reached, determining how to reach it, and agreeing to participate in the conversation, partners open a communicative space among themselves. Communicative action is employed in various ways in everyday life; it entails principles and agreements, with people working together while trying to understand others' views and come to a mutual understanding. In the context of this project, it involves agreeing about how to proceed or interact when developing learning experiences for children and teachers. Over time, however, such agreements can be forgotten or become unsettled or unstable (Kemmis et al., 2014). When that happens, it is important to remind participants of their commitment to communicative action so they can unfreeze the situation together and focus on improving work habits and other rules and tools that influence their work (Kemmis et al., 2014). When actors commit to the principles of communicative action, the effect is an open communicative space where participants in

conversation expand their dialogue, share ideas, and take their progress seriously (Kemmis et al., 2014)—in other words, a third space.

The theory of the third space provided the main theoretical framework for this project. I used Bhabha's (1990) and Zeichner's (2010) definition of hybrid spaces when I prepared my research and processed the data. In Chapter 6, I present how I sought to generate knowledge on how to establish the third space as a learning arena in preschool teacher education.

### **3.3.2 Boundary crossing**

Participants who cross boundaries are representatives of their "space," as they have a specific kind of knowledge and are able to introduce and integrate their knowledge within the space (Akkerman & Bakker 2011; Wenger, 1998). The risk is that participants can often feel like outsiders who do not belong and cannot connect with others in this new, "other" space. For this reason, it is important to build a combined space, where knowledge is shared and developed in the context of the new space; together, participants might develop something different, new, or fresh in their thinking and teaching methods (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Tsui & Law, 2007). Every system has its own history, culture, tools, and ways to communicate, especially when trying to combine and develop new knowledge. This is time-consuming and can be challenging for all participants. Shared meanings and goals are the best guidelines when crossing new boundaries (Engeström, 2015; Fullan, 2016; Zeichner, 2010).

A third space in teacher education requires that the various actors cross boundaries: As Wenger (1998) explains, transformation can happen when actors move from one practice to another. He also stated that communities do not only hold boundaries as they seek connection to the world, and he reiterated that communities cannot be isolated or understood as independent and unaffected from the outside (Martin et al., 2011; Zeichner, 2010). However, the creation of a third space can face distinct obstacles. Participants need to be open, willing to negotiate, and prepared to change the way they think; here, things can become complex. Explaining activities that are normal for participants and simply interwoven into their everyday life can make encounters challenging. One of the main challenges is to transfer what is developed back to practice in participating arenas, where it should be used to enhance students' learning (Lillejord and Børte, 2016).

According to Zeichner (2010), cultivating a third space can address the theory-practice disconnection in teacher education. Believing that crossing

boundaries and connecting spaces can strengthen student teachers' education, Zeichner suggested a few possibilities for building and developing the third space. One suggestion involves universities hiring capable teachers from the field, whom he characterized as boundary crossers. Those teachers need to have a good connection with the working arena as well as competence and skill in engaging in collaboration between universities and preschools (Zeichner, 2010). Zeichner's (2010) ideas are important and timely due to ever-growing demands to strengthen education and build a collaborative community between the field and universities. Because I did not conduct an intervention, the boundary crossing did not happen. However, while developing the model that could be used to create a shared learning arena, I was aware of the importance in establishing partnership in teacher education.

### **3.3.3 Field practice in preschool teacher education**

A major challenge in teacher education is designing programs that lay a foundation that supports student teachers' abilities to connect theory and practice in their practicum (Bjarnadóttir, 2015; Korthagen, 2010). Programs that mirror the realities of actual teaching practice may strengthen this foundation. Importantly, in the creation of such programs, the relevant stakeholders need to agree on what practice-based instruction students require for their work in the field (Boge et al., 2009). However, this is difficult, as the relationship between education and practice is complicated; theory is often understood as being everything that is not practice and is implied to be normative for practice. Moreover, theory is also often understood as originating from practice (Saugstad, 2002). In teacher education, these two concepts interact and shape student teachers and their ability to become competent educators (Zeichner, 2010). Theory and practice have both been found to be important factors in preschool teacher education (Simonsen, 2017). As Simonsen (2017) stated, it is not enough to read (theory) in order to become an excellent preschool teacher, nor is it enough to do the job (practice) and have no theory to connect to one's actions. Both are equally important learning arenas in preschool teachers' professional development.

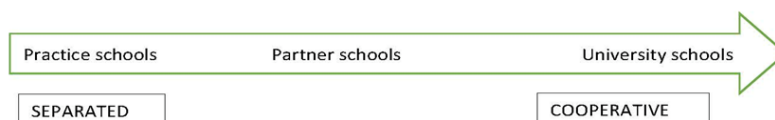
Karlsson Lohmander (2015) claimed that field practice plays an important role in preschool teacher education since students often sense a gap between practice and theory or between preschools and the university classroom. They often experience difficulties in translating theory to practice (Karlsson Lohmander, 2015). This was also apparent in Lewis's

(2012) research; she found that student teachers often view schools and universities as separate entities, and this separation impacts students' ability to apply their theoretical knowledge. Creating a third space is a way to narrow that gap, one that incorporates the involvement of all stakeholders in preschool teacher education (Zeichner, 2010). In this project, I am aware that the practice field and the university might experience a gap between these two pillars in preschool teacher education. By focusing on the creation of the third space and partnership, I try to design a mutual learning arena with a focus on shared knowledge.

### 3.4 Partnership in preschool teacher education

For a partnership to be successful, it is important that it is structured according to the dynamics among the participants, with a focus on enabling and strengthening professionalism in teacher education (Lillejord and Børte, 2016). In this regard, Smith (2016) proposed the concept of true partnership in teacher education, defined as an agreement between teacher education institutions and stakeholders in education to work toward the shared goal of improving and educating student teachers. Smith (2016) claimed that true partnership in teacher education is an agreement between the institutions and stakeholders of teacher education to work toward improving the learning of future teachers. She stressed that words alone cannot improve practice: For practice to be improved, the fundamental conditions of collaboration must be familiar to all stakeholders and accepted by all participants (Smith, 2016). This aligns with what Wenger (1998) referred to as a "community of practice," in which participants develop, negotiate, share ideas, and try to reach a mutual agreement.

Smith (2016) presents three models of collaboration between universities and schools (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4 Typical school-university relationship in education (Smith, 2016, p. 28).**

In the first model, schools and universities work separately. The university representative informs participants from the school about the practicum in a meeting and then visits the school once or twice during the practice period. Here, the power and the decisions are kept within the



university, and the responsibility is clearly divided. In the second model, the university invites schools to apply to become partner schools, and the agreement includes mutual commitments and resembles a partnership. In the third model, the municipality, the school, and the university work in cooperation; the school applies to become a university school, and the municipality—in cooperation with the university—makes the final decision. This is more cooperative and involves working in true partnership (Smith, 2016).

In my research, I use Smith's continuum and data analysis to examine what characterizes the partnership in preschool teacher education.

### **3.4.1 Research on qualities of true partnership**

Halvorsen (2014) examined teacher education and practice in multiple teacher education programs in Norway, focusing on partnerships. She identified resources that support the expansion of true partnership according to four qualities: intentionality, unpredictability, flexibility, and vitality. All four qualities can influence how partnerships develop and their capacity to expand into platforms for true, ongoing partnership. When stakeholders engage in partnerships, they have different expectations and often seek to protect their independence. Accordingly, partnerships that start with a clear vision and a strong intention to work toward shared goals are more likely to be democratic, but if the intention is weak and actors are forced to participate, power struggles and tension are likely to ensue (Halvorsen, 2014).

Working in partnerships requires expecting the unexpected, and participants' reactions to unforeseen incidents are critical to determining whether learning occurs or whether problems arise that prompt participants to blame each other (Halvorsen, 2014). Lack of trust can provoke blaming, and when the unexpected is viewed as problematic, participants are unlikely to develop mutually beneficial partnerships (Halvorsen, 2014). In contrast, if the unforeseen is approached as a challenge and mutual trust exists among the partners, partnership relations can be reinforced. In that sense, flexibility is an important aspect of collaboration in partnerships (Halvorsen, 2014). Participants join for various reasons, and if they free themselves from ingrained habits and rituals, new ideas can emerge, and innovation, creativity, and engagement are likely to materialize (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010). In teacher education, it has been suggested that dialogue and social connection seem to play major roles in collaboration; however, without flexibility,

partnerships are unlikely to develop beyond formal agreements and will be negatively affected when participants cannot comfortably position themselves therein (Halvorsen, 2014).

**Table 1. Qualities of partnership in teacher education (adapted from Halvorsen 2014, p. 58-69).**

	<b>Intentionality</b>	<b>Unpredictability</b>	<b>Flexibility</b>	<b>Vitality</b>
<b>Strong</b>	Clear vision and strong intentions  Increased democracy	Challenges and mutual trust  Learning experiences	Freedom and new ideas  Innovation	Sustained engagement and creativity
<b>Weak</b>	Tensions and concerns  Power struggles	Problems and blame	Restrictive habits and rituals	Difficulties in positioning themselves in the partnerships

Using these four qualities (Halvorsen, 2014) helps establish the pillars of effective partnerships between preschool teacher university programs and preschools in my research.

### **3.5 Using the theory in my own learning expansion**

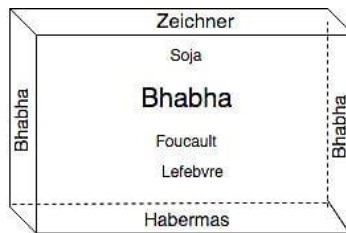
This empirical research lasted almost six years, from August 2015 to March 2021. In this chapter, I explain how I used Engeström’s (2016) theory of expansive learning (presented in Chapter 3) to collect data, along with the development of the project and my learning during this process. This chapter provides insight into the design of the research.

#### **3.5.1 Starting point**

I have a personal interest in this topic, as I previously worked as a preschool teacher and preschool principal. I also have experience with field practice from my study as a preschool student teacher. However, after I started working at the university, where students had a short period of field practice in one of the courses I taught, I began to think of ways to improve the partnership between the university and the practice field. I wanted to do this because I felt a distance between the other non-student actors and me during the field practice. Thus, I wanted to look into what I, a university teacher, could do to strengthen the connection. I began to think about doctoral studies at that time and heard about such concepts as activity

system, third space, and boundary crossing. While these concepts seemed strange and distant, they intrigued me; thus, I sought to look further into the concept of the third space. After I read Zeichner’s (2010) article mentioning boundary crossers, or those who work in a hybrid space, I decided to investigate the origin of the idea of the third space and how I could use this theory in my research.

Through my literature review about the third space (see Chapters 3 and 4), it became clearer how and why the third or hybrid space might not only be useful but also powerful in teacher education, given that one of the goals with the third space is to give people opportunities to participate, be heard, and have a say in their own lives and education—something I value in my work as a teacher and working with students. Figure 5 shows how I use the definition of the third and hybrid space in teacher education, with Bhabha’s (1990) definition of a hybrid space as the pillar of the theory, Habermas’s (1996) public sphere as the foundation of the thinking, and Zeichner’s (2010) connections between field practice in teacher education and hybrid spaces.



**Figure 5 Pillars of the third space**

Thus, the cognitive journey began by putting together the literature and my experiences—as well as what I wanted to know and do, beginning with Engeström’s (2016) expansive learning cycle.

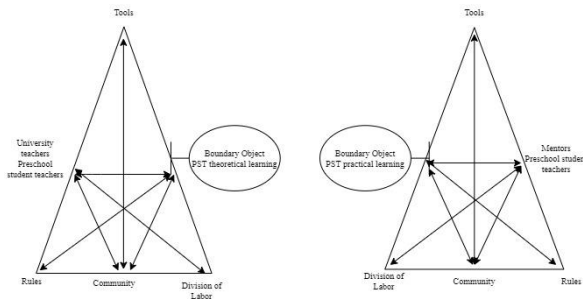
### **3.5.2 Engeström’s learning cycle**

As mentioned earlier, I used Engeström’s (2015) expansive learning cycle during my doctoral studies, both to see the development of my learning expansion and to stay on track in the research process. In this chapter, I detail how I used the cycle and prepared the research. The cycle has seven learning actions (Engeström, 2016); in my research, I present the first four learning actions, as the intervention did not happen. However, I did meet with preschool principals, teachers, project managers, and preschool advisors from one municipality. We examined the model presented in

Chapter 7 and discussed possible solutions and ways to use the model to strengthen the partnership.

### 3.5.2.1 Primary contradiction: need statement

Starting with the first learning action (Engeström & Sannino, 2010), I asked myself what change was needed in preschool teacher education field practice. As mentioned earlier, I felt that a change was needed in the collaboration between universities and the field of preschool teacher education. I began by looking into why this change was needed and what changes I imagined would strengthen the collaboration between actors. To start, I drew a picture (see Figure 6) of the two activity systems—preschools and universities—and asked: *In what ways can the collaboration between initial stakeholders in preschool teacher education in Iceland be strengthened?*



**Figure 6 Two systems in preschool teacher education**

While preparing for the research and looking into what objects were in the partnership, I used Engeström’s dimension of expansion (2016) by asking questions (See Chapter 3.2.1) connected to the socio-spatial dimension (Engeström, 2016), for example: *Who is learning?* This looks at the collective learners instead of individuals. In this research, it was preschool student teachers as well as actors in both universities and preschools. I further asked: *Where does learning happen for the preschool student teachers?* The learning happens in both systems, but I needed to research whether and how the knowledge or objects were connected between the two systems I identified in the beginning. To answer the first questions—who is learning and why and where—I moved from the first action to the second action of the cycle, analyzing these two activity systems (Engeström, 2001) in Figure 6 by examining historical and current partnerships in field practice.

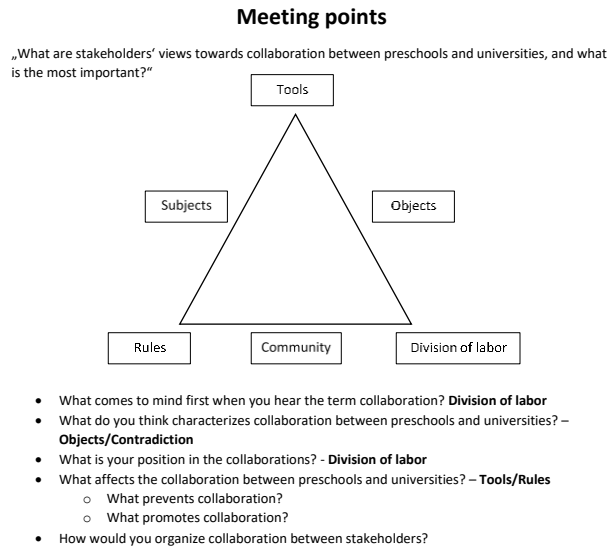
Looking into the temporal dimension, I asked: *How does the preschool student teachers' learning cross between the university and the preschool?* (Engeström, 2016). The political-ethical dimension requires questions such as: *What is learned during the field practice and why?* and *Does preschool teacher education have a social impact on society?* These questions are discussed in the next section.

### 3.5.2.2 *Secondary contradiction: double bind*

In the second action in the learning expansion, I started with a historical analysis, researching the development of preschool teacher education in Iceland from 1946 to 2015, to try to understand the history to better comprehend the present situation in education. I looked into the temporal dimension (Engeström, 2016) of how the preschool student teachers learning crosses between the university and asked how theory and practice have been integrated into the education during the decades. Using historical analysis helped me make sense of the past by seeing the traces it left behind.

A close look at the relationship between the practice field and the departments of education at universities revealed a disconnection. More focus appears to be on theory, but as I discussed in Chapter 2, in Iceland, the majority of students work during their studies, and many have years of experience working in preschools before they enter a university. Therefore, I needed to analyze the current situation and prepare an empirical analysis, for which I conducted focus group interviews with initial stakeholders. I connected this to the political-ethical dimension by looking into the field practice to answer what was learned during the practice period and what was considered important in the partnership.

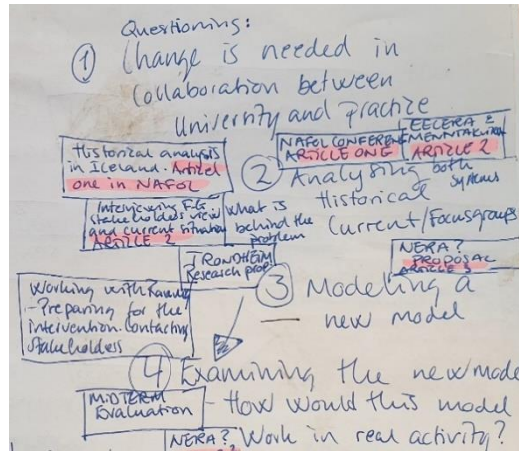
In the next two studies, I used focus groups to gather data. The purpose of these focus groups was to gather information on the collaboration and meeting points between the two systems, based on the literature about partnership and the third space (see Halvorsen, 2014; Moje et al., 2004; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010) (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7 Meeting points between activity systems**

Drawing on the literature about mentoring and professional rhetoric (see Chapter 4), I also asked participants to reflect on their field practice experiences to better understand the connections and divisions of labor between and within the systems, asking the question: *What are the effects of mentoring on the professional development of preschool student teachers in field studies?* (Hennum & Østrem, 2016; Nolan & Molla, 2018; Røys, 2017; Smith, 2015).

After the interviews and historical analysis, I drew a picture (see Figure 8) to plan the next steps.



**Figure 8 Preparing for the unknown**

Lastly, I planned to implement a formative intervention starting in fall 2018 to examine how to build a collaborative space by creating a third space as a learning area (Bahaba, 1990; Zeichner, 2010). This last part did not go according to plan, as discussions arose around possibly changing the last year of field practice in teacher education in Iceland, which would have meant putting everything on hold or changing the focus of the research. Both universities wanted to see what would change and thus were not ready to implement an intervention at that time. Thus, I needed to refocus and think about the overall aim of my research: to examine how collaboration between various actors in preschool teacher education can be improved by developing and transforming university and preschool partnerships, with an emphasis on the third space. I used Engeström's (2015) activity system as an analysis tool and drew a picture of the two systems, but it became apparent that at least one other system needed to be in the picture: the Department of Education in the municipalities, as the majority of student teachers work and are supported by their municipalities.

Reviewing my findings from the other three studies, I saw that some stakeholders were missing, including actors who impact both activity systems: local politicians and deans/other teachers at the university who have power or influence over field practice. Trying to answer the political-ethical dimension (Engeström, 2016) of whether preschool teacher education has a social impact on society, I conducted individual interviews with politicians, university teachers, and preschool teachers with mentoring

education to collect their perspectives on field practice and collaboration between stakeholders.

After the interviews, I used Engeström's (2015) activity system to map how each system works within and among these three systems to find what participants hoped to gain with the partnership. The partially shared objects were different for each system. For the preschools, it was helping the students connect theory to practice. For the Department of Education, it was contracts with employees to keep their salaries during their studies in preschool teacher education. Finally, for the universities, it was teaching theory and learning to reflect using theory in practical situations. Their shared objects were to strengthen the professionalism in the preschools, with a focus on well-educated preschool teachers and children's learning opportunities.

### *3.5.2.3 Modeling the new solution*

Using the findings from the four studies (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of the studies), I started to draw different solutions to form the third space in preschool teacher education and strengthen the partnership among the actors. For the first model, I used Lillejord and Børte's (2016) proposal on professional learning in teacher education; their model places student learning at the center of the collaboration among stakeholders. Lillejord and Børte (2016) argue that the most pressing concern in partnership formation is how to establish a productive dialogue between mentors and university teachers. This aligns with Lewis's (2012) findings that students need a third space, where initial stakeholders can mediate and combine students' experiences to further empower growth and narrow the gap. The model for professional learning in teacher education (Lillejord & Børte, 2016, p. 599) illustrates how collaboration among the three types of actors keeps students' learning at the center of activities while easing the tension between theory and practice.

### *3.5.2.4 Examining the new model*

I felt the model was incomplete, as it did not present the challenges and qualities that need to be implemented, nor did it expand the outcome of the collaboration or create a new object. Therefore, I decided to add Halvorsen's (2014) resources of true partnership to see whether that model would better explain the cycle of learning in the third space and if understanding the traditions of different systems might help identify the pillars of effective partnership between preschool teacher university



programs and preschools. As mentioned earlier, the qualities Halvorsen (2014) identified—intentionality, unpredictability, flexibility, and vitality—can support the expansion of true partnership. Each quality can influence how partnerships develop and their capacity to expand into other platforms, which allows ongoing work.

This model was closer to what I consider to be a solution for the creation of a new learning platform with an emphasis on partnership. Still, I could see that the model needed to present the fundamental elements needed to create a third space. How do actors cross boundaries, how do they feel they belong, and how can they be involved? With these questions in mind, I further developed my model, working through the findings from the four studies.

Breaking down the model further by using the theoretical concepts I discuss in my thesis, as well as what happens in a learning community, I came to the conclusion that the third space is a community of learners and takes the form of the actors' requirements. To simplify this, I imagined the third space as similar to the Room of Requirement in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, as that room changes according to the participants' needs. Therefore, I created a model that further breaks each action down, a model that does not formally show Halvorsen's (2014) qualities, even though with each concept, these four qualities would strengthen the formation of a partnership. In the new model—which I presented to a group of principals (8), preschool teachers (8), project managers (2), preschool advisors (2), and university teachers (2)—I went deeper into the roots of networking, shared vision, and learning community. The model and the main findings will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

### **3.6 Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed the fundamental concepts of my research, starting with Engeström's (2015) activity system and expansive learning theory (Engeström, 2016) and how these are used in my project. Next, I discussed the third space and how it can be used in teacher education, introducing the approaches and relevant literature (Bhabha, 1990; Moje et al., 2004; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010) in terms of how to put this theory into action. Moreover, I have discussed the importance of boundary crossing in the creation of a shared learning arena. I discussed the importance of field practice in teacher education and how true partnership can strengthen and create a platform for the third space to thrive. These different theories both supplement and challenge each other. Engeström's

(2016) expansive learning theory and Bhabha's (1990) definition of the third space supplement each other, as both theories focus on collective learning. This is also true in the other theories chosen in this project, as the focus is on the shared learning arena. Halvorsen's (2014) and Smith's (2016) theories also stress the importance of collectiveness, and Engeström's (2015) activity system also challenges the other theories with the focus on artifacts and contradiction within each system. Using chosen theories, I can better understand the obstacles to forming a third space conducive to learning. It is challenging on multiple fronts to bring together different systems with diverse histories and work ethics. I believe that research design needs to be carefully planned and sensitive to the needs of all actors in preschool teacher education for it to be successful.

In the last section, I presented how the project progressed while I applied the underlying theory of the third space and partnership. I also used Engeström's (2016) model of expansive learning, as it gave me an overview of the procedure and guided me during different phases of the research.

## **4 Relevant literature**

This chapter presents relevant literature on the third space and partnership during field practice in initial (pre)school teacher education. Much of this literature review is about partnership in initial teacher education between universities and elementary schools and colleges. To the best of my knowledge, research on the third space in preschool teacher education and on partnership between universities and preschools in Iceland is limited. The starting point for my research was Zeichner's (2010) article about partnership and the third space in teacher education. In the follow-up for this study, the inclusion criteria for review were peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters on teacher and preschool teacher education, the third space in teacher education, and partnership in the third space in English, Norwegian, and Icelandic from 1949 to 2021. In this chapter, literature from 2010 to 2021 is reviewed.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section 4.1 provides an overview of the studies related to the project. Section 4.2 summarizes the main findings of the previous studies and points out the gaps in the extant literature. Section 4.3 presents the overarching research question and the sub-questions that are answered in the four articles.

### **4.1 Partnership in the third space**

The literature on the third space in teacher education and particularly on partnership explicates that partnership aims to improve education for student teachers. This is evidenced in a study by Helleve and Ulvik (2019), where the research aim was to understand how to build the third space. According to them, providing future teachers with high-quality education is important. This is in line with Lillejord and Børte's (2016) finding that collaborative partnership is conclusive to support students' professional learning. They also proposed that a partnership aimed at helping students grow as future teachers, where their learning focuses on connecting theory and practice, helps create a learning community. Clark (2019) suggested that this goal can likely be accomplished by creating platforms that embrace both practical and theoretical knowledge, where integration requires genuine

collaboration among partners and where partners are valued as professionals and encouraged to share knowledge and power. This is in line with findings from Passy et al. (2018) and Sewell et al. (2018), which indicate that the partnership among actors who share common interests and visions is likely to better support collaboration and provide a foundation for the partnership to grow. According to Grudnoff et al. (2017), who conducted a study on practicum in initial teacher education, examining main factors to the contribution in developing the third space in university-school partnership. Grudnoff et al (2017) findings showed that by building a collaborative partnership, partners can structure models that enhance professional growth for all actors.

Klein et al. (2016) described the creation of the third space in university-school partnership and found that the development of a third space with an emphasis on learning dialogues and partnership is not linear. This finding is supported by Wang and Wong's (2017) study on boundary crossing in a university-school partnership; their findings showed that creating a third space takes time and requires the involvement of all stakeholders. Lemon et al.'s (2018) study conducted in Australia showed that collaborative ventures where actors meet and discuss their own inquiries are important, which is supported by Passy et al.'s (2018) study on university-school partnership drawing on the idea of the third space. Passy et al. (2018) stress the importance of actors having different needs and expectations for the partnership. Therefore, discussing the partnership and what actors want to pay attention to is fundamental for learning dialogues in the third space (Klein et al., 2016; Lemon et al., 2018).

As Klein et al. (2016) mentioned, the creation of the third space is non-linear. Nguyen (2020) showed that a university-school partnership among stakeholders is sometimes separated, and the division of labor and communication can be uneven; this can cause tension in the partnership. Lillejord and Børte (2016) concluded that the dynamics in joint spaces, such as universities and (pre)schools, can create tensions that often lead to power struggles. Student teachers can experience the tension between university teachers and mentors and find themselves in situations where they have to choose sides. Moreover, one of the challenges in creating a joint space can be the university calendar (e.g., semesters), wherein learning is embedded in schedules and timeframes (Klein et al., 2016).

Gupta (2015), in a study on the pedagogy of the third space in diverse cultures, suggested that a joint space could be created by developing a curriculum that reflects the approach of the third space. Grudnoff et al. (2017) suggested that this approach guides and prepares teachers for the diverse ways of learning and teaching. This aligns with Smith's (2016) finding that discussions among the actors, wherein they are encouraged to rethink and recreate the partnership, might present the opportunity to lay the foundation for true partnership.

According to Canrinus et al. (2017), coherence in the curriculum is important to ensure that all stakeholders "enhance learners' knowledge constructions" (p. 328). Daza et al. (2021) claimed that when establishing the third space for professional practice, a key point is to negotiate identities and cross boundaries, as the actors combine areas of knowledge from both practice and theory. Various studies have shown that discussions and mutual respect are important factors in the creation of the third space in university-school partnership (Klein et al., 2016; Lemon et al., 2018; Passey et al., 2018). This aligns with Halvorsen's (2014) and Smith's (2016) findings that participation from the beginning of the partnership—where actors have a say in what they want to accomplish in the partnership—is important, as the feeling of belonging strengthens the collaboration. To my knowledge, so far, no Icelandic research on partnership in preschool teacher education has been conducted.

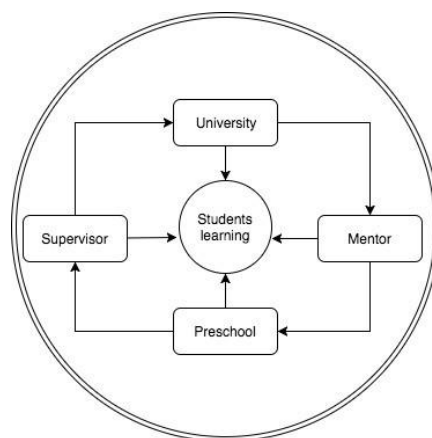
The following sections discuss the importance of boundary crossing and a non-hierarchical community where practical and theoretical knowledge are supported, as this appears to be an essential factor in strengthening teacher education and the creation of the third space.

#### **4.1.1 Boundary crossing**

According to Chan (2020), Gupta (2020), and Lee (2018), when preparing to build a mutual learning arena or cross institutional boundaries, considering the cultural context in which the schools are situated is important. Chan (2020) examined crossing institutional borders and found that the creation of the third space may involve challenges, as it is neither always easy to cross boundaries nor easy for individuals to let go of what they know. When participants are asked to be open, willing to negotiate, and willing to change the way they think, the process can become complex (Lillejord & Børte, 2016). Explaining

activities that are normal for participants and interwoven into their everyday life can make encounters challenging. A major challenge is transferring what is developed to the participating institutions, with a focus on enhancing students' learning. Klein et al. (2016) and Steele (2017) showed that by creating an adaptive joint supervision or a learning environment without hierarchy, using dialogue, and letting go of the norm, university teachers and mentors can build the groundwork for partnership. In line with Klein et al.'s (2016) findings, these meetings between actors in preschool teacher education can be productive and enable rich conversations in the third space.

Ben-Harush and Orland-Barak (2019) showed the relationships between mentors, student teachers, and university teachers are affected by power relations. Tensions can arise; triadic collaboration can be ripe for conflict among participants. Disagreement and strain can occur when university teachers and mentors disagree over how to teach and which professional skills to develop. Another factor that introduces tension is authority (in the form of expert knowledge) and its role in collaboration. Lillejord and Børte (2016) found that to decrease power struggles and tension, acknowledging that all three participating actors have different perspectives is critical. The model for professional learning in teacher education (Lillejord & Børte, 2016, p. 599) illustrates how collaboration among the three actors keeps students' learning at the center of the activities (see Figure 9) while



**Figure 9 Model for learning dialogues in teacher education partnership (Adapted from Lillejord & Børte, 2016, p. 559)**

easing the tension between theory and practice.

Ben-Harush and Orland-Barak (2019) also found that different interactions patterns between university teachers and mentors have different effects on the learning outcomes of preschool student teachers. With dissonant interaction patterns, the hierarchical power relations between university teachers and mentors, the division of labor, and the contradictions between the two cultures are evident. Harmonic interaction patterns are also characterized by the division of labor and hierarchical power relations between the two types of professionals, but here professional collaboration has room to grow. Argumentative interaction patterns feature balanced power relations between the two types of professionals and their ability to acknowledge the differences between the two cultures; moreover, the division of labor is equal between the two groups (Ben-Harush & Orland-Barak, 2019). When university teachers and mentors work together and structure the practicum based on shared goals, professional engagement can be enhanced for all actors (Grudnoff et al., 2017). Therefore, as Ben-Harush and Orland-Barak's (2019) findings showed, an argumentative interaction pattern could be the best solution for creating a hybrid practice.

In summary, the literature underlines the importance of student teachers' learning, which is the focal point for the partnership. Before the third space is created, the partnership needs to be strengthened, and actors need help crossing their institutional boundaries. This can be achieved through the role of boundary crosser, which is further discussed in the next section.

#### **4.1.2 Leadership in the creation of the third space**

Passy et al. (2018) stressed that support from both leaders and institutions is vital for actors to commit the time and energy needed in the partnership, which is in line with Lillejord and Børte's (2016) findings that such partnerships rarely succeed without support. Jackson and Burch (2019) also showed that boundary crossing requires leadership, where the leader acts as a boundary broker or a boundary crosser, as Zeichner (2010) considered in his article and as I have chosen to consider in this thesis.

The boundary crosser aids in the merging and integrating of the actors who are crossing institutional boundaries (Jackson & Burch, 2019). Some of the debates a leader must mediate between are power

struggles owing to group dynamics and assumptions and ideas about what knowledge is most valuable (Zeichner, 2010). According to Jackson and Burch (2019), a boundary crosser can balance the spaces that are merging and help actors create hybridity. In teacher education, this space could focus on evaluating teaching and helping others to teach.

Creating new roles during field practice helps disrupt traditional ways of doing things. Grudnoff et al. (2017) examined the rethinking and renovation of field practice, roles, and relationships and showed that such changes were critical in the third space practicum. Rethinking roles provoked actors to think differently and cross boundaries, thus introducing different ideas and new practices to their own systems. In Grudnoff et al.'s (2017) study, the school principal's involvement increased, and their leadership and commitment to the project were important in creating an environment focused on learning and the development of new approaches.

Passy et al. (2018) found that when building a professional learning community centered on partnership during the practicum, it is important to ensure the support of the leadership in both the university and the schools, as these projects often have little to no funding and are based on the actors' vision and beliefs. As mentioned earlier, to change the collaboration into a true partnership, realizing that such collaboration takes time is important. Williams et al. (2018) showed that working and learning together strengthens the foundation for collaborative thinking and is likely to create a learning arena built on hybrid knowledge, which aligns with Zeichner's (2010) findings.

In sum, previous research indicates that leadership is crucial for strengthening collaboration and creating the third space. Such leadership should have experience in both systems and the capability to work between systems. Research also reveals that leaders in both systems can connect and lead their communities together during the process of building the third space. This information is used in my model when presenting how to organize the process in collaboration between partners.

#### **4.1.3 Professional development during the practice period**

One of the most pressing tasks for newly qualified preschool teachers is developing the knowledge they gained in "theory-oriented" courses



in relation to their teaching in preschools (Nolan & Molla, 2018). Mentoring builds preschool teachers' professional capabilities, which manifests in confidence in their practice (Nolan & Molla, 2018). Smith and Ulvik (2015) showed that mentors support students in accessing their theoretical knowledge and support practice by helping students build their personal knowledge. Nolan and Molla's (2018) research on professional learning through mentoring in early childhood education showed that a safe learning environment, where collaboration and collegiality are emphasized, supports equal learning. Keiler et al. (2020) showed that high-quality feedback is important in mentoring experiences for both the mentor and the mentee. Fitchett et al. (2018) reported that the practice period's quality is more important than its length. Their findings showed that this quality is determined by students' opportunities to integrate knowledge, theory, and practice while being observed, debriefed, and guided by their mentors. Nyckel et al. (2020) showed that, in Sweden, preschool student teachers' educational and practical backgrounds affect how they reflect on theory and practice.

According to Arnesson and Albinsson (2017), during the learning process, mentorship plays a crucial role in the integration of theory and practice. Smith (2015) showed that mentors take on many responsibilities, thus making mentorship a complex role; it requires a mentor to act as teacher, guide, counselor, motivator, sponsor, and role model. Mentors are responsible for teaching mentees about practice, guiding them in the new world, being counselors who listen and show empathy, and motivating the mentees if they feel discouraged by challenges. Therefore, it is important that mentors are cognizant of their role and influence on their mentees' professional learning development (Smith, 2015).

Smith (2015) also stressed the difference between teaching children and teaching adults; a qualified teacher who is successful in the classroom does not necessarily have the same skills in mentoring adults. According to Smith (2015), teaching and mentoring have different purposes. Mentoring is support for professional learning and growth, and its recipients are adults beginning their professional careers. Helleve and Ulvik (2019) showed that in the creation of the third space, formal mentor education seems to be vital, as mentors with formal education are more likely to see themselves as teacher

educators and to feel that they are equals and colleagues in the partnership.

The following section discusses how high-quality mentoring can strengthen the preschool profession and professional rhetoric.

#### *4.1.3.1 Professional rhetoric of preschool teachers*

Hennum and Østrem (2016) define a profession as having a unique or specific education that not everyone can perform and implement; this should also apply to the preschool teaching profession. The moral side of professionalism can be divided into three parts. First, it is the intrinsic value of the job, and preschool teachers are committed to the care and education of preschool children. Secondly, it is integrity and honesty in work, and thirdly, the preschool teacher is committed to the criteria of recognized knowledge and methods in the professional field of preschool teachers (Hennum & Østrem, 2016; Kristinsson, 2013). As previously stated, the ethics of professionalism can be divided into three (Kristinsson, 2013). When the professional knowledge and professionalism of the preschool teacher is divided into these three aspects, 1) knowledge of care, education, learning, and play, 2) can use their knowledge at work and 3) be able to manage and morally link their knowledge. All of these factors affect collaboration with others and external communication. The conversation is based on the subject, knowledge, and skills in linking science to work (Hennum & Østrem, 2016).

They also point out that the reinforcement of professional rhetoric could be an efficient way to highlight the expertise of preschool teachers. If there is doubt about professional rhetoric, then the question is not what they do but how they share it (Hennum & Østrem, 2016). Professional rhetoric is necessary for teachers, as it can help them understand their learning and translate it to teaching practice (Bjarnadóttir, 2015). Awareness of the profession is connected to professional conversations; note that teachers' professionalism and professional awareness are connected factors that construct their teaching capability (Bjarnadóttir, 2015). As stated by Hennum and Østrem (2016), for professional rhetoric to be specific and concrete, awareness of the preschool environment is needed for both student teachers doing their field practice (so that they have the opportunity to deepen the conversation) and, as Eik's (2014) findings showed, for new preschool teachers starting in preschools.

Eik et al. (2016) showed that preschools often have a flat structure, and some studies (Eik, 2014; Einarsdóttir, et al., 2013) have shown that those who work in preschools consider themselves capable of efficiently handling all duties of preschool teachers. This is in agreement with a study conducted in Iceland (Einarsdóttir et al., 2013) showing that the division of daily labor between teachers and other educators—in care as well as participation in play and action—is unclear. Hennum and Østrem (2016) stated that preschool teachers have tacit knowledge—knowledge that is present but not communicated. This can make the profession vulnerable because others interpret and analyze the teachers’ intentions and knowledge. The existence of tacit knowledge can weaken the profession and decrease the awareness of the profession and the professionalism of the preschool (Eik et al., 2016; Hennum & Østrem, 2016). Eik (2014) showed that newly qualified teachers who adapt to the culture at their school abandon professional discourse; according to Hennum and Østrem (2016), this consequently decreases the chance that professional rhetoric will develop among new teachers. However, the systematic use of mentoring during the practice period can influence the quality and development of professionalism in preschools (Røys, 2017).

Røys (2017) found that preschools’ progress is connected to the competence of the early childhood educators who participate in the pedagogical process. Society continuously develops and changes, which affects preschools. Hennum and Østrem (2016) emphasized that dialogue with other stakeholders is necessary so that teachers can have an impact on what is being said and gain an opportunity to present their work and knowledge. These conversations are important, as they impact teachers’ professional development as well as their capability to reflect on their work and to work in collaboration with colleagues. Hennum and Østrem (2016) also discussed that demands from policymakers, municipalities, and national institutions can affect the focus in (pre)schools and the conversations among professionals. Imbalance can occur if the focus is on a single aspect of work or study within the preschool; one consequence could be that the professional rhetoric becomes monotonous and evolves around only one aspect of the work. For example, in Iceland, literacy has received national focus (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2014); thus, many municipalities and preschools have highlighted this objective. This aligns with Einarsdóttir et al.’s (2013) findings that preschool teachers

need to discuss and articulate their definition of labor. Einarsdóttir et al. (2013) also stressed the importance of the specialized knowledge of preschool teachers, which must be made visible to ensure high-quality education for children in preschools.

According to Røys (2017), professional rhetoric can be strengthened during field practice using mentoring dialogue to reflect on activities and to connect theory and practice. Reinforcement of professional rhetoric could efficiently highlight the expertise of preschool teachers, as professional rhetoric is an important factor in the awareness and empowerment of preschool teachers (Einarsdóttir et al., 2013; Hennum & Østrem, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the practice period is a critical time in students' professional development. Therefore, providing students with learning opportunities that help them develop expert knowledge and skills can strengthen their professionalism (Molla & Nolan, 2019).

In summary, research has revealed that practicum and mentoring affect student teachers' professional identity and competence. By allowing them time to reflect and ensuring that they partake in the pedagogical process, students can likely develop professional competence and strengthen their professional rhetoric. In the creation of the third space focused on student teachers' learning, this knowledge seems crucial—especially in my project, where I study the third space during the practice period.

## **4.2 Summary of existing knowledge and gaps**

Previous research revealed that effective communication and mutual respect among actors help to lay the foundation needed when entering a partnership aimed at building a third space. An important factor in the third space in teacher education is that students' learning needs to be the focal point of discussions and joint learning arenas (Clark, 2019; Lillejord & Børte, 2016). Previous studies indicated the importance of the cultural context through mapping whether and how a partnership exists between stakeholders before initiating the third space (Chan, 2020; Gupta, 2015; Lee, 2018). They also showed that the created partnerships can be separated and thus lead to tension among the stakeholders (Nguyen, 2020). Studies also revealed the need to support practical and theoretical knowledge, as these appear to be essential in strengthening teachers' education and creating the third space (Clark, 2019; Lillejord & Børte, 2016). A gap in the literature

exists regarding the formation of a university–preschool partnership, as most studies are conducted at other educational levels. Moreover, literature dealing with the creation of the third space in preschool teacher education in terms of joint learning arenas during field practice is limited. The conflicts preschool student teachers experience in a separated partnership that can affect their education during field practice are also an unmapped field in Iceland; even international research on this topic is limited (Gupta, 2015, 2020; Nyckel et al., 2020).

Collaboration and the creation of the third space could be facilitated by hiring a boundary crosser who leads the partnership between the systems (Jackson & Burch, 2019). Otherwise, leaders in both systems can help ensure that teachers and students are given sufficient time and opportunities to discuss what they are learning and how they can create a new learning space (Grudnoff et al., 2017). A gap in the literature seems to exist regarding boundary crossing in the third space in preschool teacher education. Various approaches have been used to determine stakeholders' involvement and perspectives in boundary crossing in the third space, but studies that focus on boundary crossing in preschool teacher education are still lacking (Nyckel, 2020).

Research has revealed that practicum and mentoring affect student teachers' professional identity and competence. Evidence obtained in Iceland and Norway (Eik et al., 2016; Einarsdóttir et al., 2013) suggests that the profession is weak, as the professionalism is not visible to others who work in preschools. To the best of my knowledge, no studies have yet been conducted on preschool student teachers' learning during their practice in Iceland or on mentoring during preschool teacher education in Iceland.

### **4.3 Research question**

The aim of this project is to examine the extent and quality of the partnerships between universities and the practice field. The goal is to find ways to improve and strengthen learning at various levels for both preschool student teachers and teacher educators (mentors) working in preschools and universities. The specific focus is on important issues for building the third space during field practice. The main research question is: "How can the 'Third Space' become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic teacher education?" The four sub-questions are:

1. How are theory and practice integrated in preschool teacher education in Iceland during different time periods?
2. What are stakeholders' perceptions of the partnership between preschools and universities, and which aspect of collaboration is most important to them?
3. How does mentoring influence the professional development and professional rhetoric of preschool student teachers during field practice?
4. What are stakeholders' experiences and expectations of collaboration for the practicum in preschool teacher education?

## **5 Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative research methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2018) using mixed data collection. This approach was chosen to capture and describe the phenomenon under study, in this case, partnership in preschool teacher education in Iceland. In this project, historical documents as well as qualitative research methods were used to gather data.

In this chapter, the project design is described and discussed, starting with an overview of the research paradigm, research methods, and data analysis. In addition, the ethical issues, limitations, and trustworthiness of the project are discussed.

### **5.1 The research paradigm**

Sociocultural constructivism is the epistemological and theoretical framework for this project (see Chapter 3.1). In a cultural and social context, by interacting, asking questions, and discussing issues with each other, individuals construct meanings of situations (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Edwards, 2005). The project's purpose is to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of Icelandic preschool teacher education and the partnership between those who educate and organize the field practice, as well as to determine how initial stakeholders experience mentoring and learning during their practicum. The project is further framed by Engeström's theory of expansive learning (see Chapter 3.2) and theory of the third space (see Chapter 3.3) and partnership (see Chapter 3.4).

I have chosen to apply mixed data collection, but mostly qualitative research. Because I am engaged in preschool teacher education, the topic is personal to me, and according to Patton (2015), qualitative research is personal, and the researcher is the instrument of the research. Qualitative methodology is useful when studying lived experiences, when interpreting participants' experiences, and when the aim is to understand a certain process (Tracy, 2020), i.e., preschool teacher education. Qualitative research is also effective when the aim is to understand how people construct their knowledge and how they reflect and perceive their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I have

worked as a preschool teacher, principal, and practitioner in the field. Since teaching courses at the University of Iceland, including field practice, I have become interested in ways to improve partnership in preschool teacher education. I believe that field practice plays a major role in teacher education since it presents students with an arena to collaborate and practice what they have learned. My motivation for this research comes from my experience and knowledge in preschool teacher practice and informs how I approach the project.

In this project, the overall research question is: “How can the ‘Third Space’ become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic teacher education?” The four sub-questions ask either how or what. The first sub-question asks: “How are theory and practice integrated in preschool teacher education in Iceland during different time periods?” The findings of this study were the foundation for asking the second sub-question: “What are stakeholders’ perceptions of the partnership between preschools and universities, and which aspect of collaboration is most important to them?” Findings from this study also led to the next sub-question: “How does mentoring influence professional development and professional rhetoric of preschool student teachers during field practice?” The final sub-question was guided by the findings from the first three studies: “What are stakeholders’ experiences and expectations of collaboration for the practicum in preschool teacher education?”

### **5.1.1 Participants**

Participants in the project were all directly or indirectly connected to preschool teacher education at the University of Iceland and the University in Akureyri. The initial stakeholders include preschool student teachers, preschool mentors, preschool principals, and university teachers. Other stakeholders, added later, included majority-party municipal policymakers serving on educational councils and university teachers with authority or influence over field practice.

In sub-studies 2 and 3, participants representing preschool teacher education programs in Iceland were selected via a mixture of snowball and purposeful sampling (Bender, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2015). Table 2 shows the criteria for the ten focus groups with initial stakeholders, with two groups representing each of the following five categories: on-campus preschool student teachers (Group VI,  $n = 6$ ; Group X,  $n = 3$ ); remote preschool student teachers (Group I,  $n = 6$ ; Group VIII,  $n = 3$ );



university-based educators (Group IV, n = 4; Group IX, n = 3); preschool-based mentors (Group III, n = 4; Group VII, n = 2); and preschool principals (Group II, n = 5; Group V, n = 6). Each group was interviewed once between November and December 2016. The group sizes varied from two to six participants. One prospective participant from each stakeholder category was contacted and asked for the name of another potential participant; this was done repeatedly until there were eight to ten names for each group (Bender, 2013; Krueger and Casey, 2015). The groups were associated with the two universities. Five groups were from the Southwest connected to the University of Iceland (UI), and five groups were associated with the University of Akureyri (UA). In this project, all remote students (n = 9) worked full time (40 hours), and one-third (n = 3) of the on-campus students worked full time while studying. The remaining six students worked during university holidays and up to ten hours per week while in school.

**Table 2. Inclusion criteria for focus group participants**

	<b>Preschool student teachers</b>	<b>University-based educators</b>	<b>Preschool-based mentors</b>	<b>Preschool principals</b>
Criteria	Bachelor students  Master students	Those teaching courses in preschool teacher education	Those mentoring preschool student teachers	Those hosting preschool student teachers in preschools  Those collaborating with universities

In Study 4 of the project, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 individuals. Four majority-party municipal policymakers serving on educational councils were interviewed from different municipalities, four preschool teachers with formal mentoring education, and four university teachers with authority or influence over field practice, two from each university. I contacted both universities and asked for information about students who had completed or were close to finishing mentoring education. Two students from each university were contacted, and all agreed to participate in the study. Information about the university teachers, their positions, and how they were connected to preschool teacher

education was retrieved from the universities' homepages. I contacted two from each university, and they agreed to participate in the research. Gaining participation from representatives of municipalities was more complicated; not everyone agreed to participate. Two participants were from municipalities in the capital area, and two were from the countryside.

## **5.2 Research methods**

Most of the methods in this project are qualitative, except for Study 1, where the documentation method was used to gather information. In Studies 2 and 3, focus group interviews were implemented, and in the last study, individual interviews were conducted to gather data.

### **5.2.1 Data gathering**

The gathering of research data started in the fall of 2015 and was completed in the summer of 2019. In Study 1, documents about the preschool teacher education from the beginning of the education were collected. In Studies 2 and 3, focus groups were conducted, and in Study 4, individual interviews were performed.

#### *5.2.1.1 Documentation*

Available literature pertaining to preschool teacher education was collected for Study 1, using the documents and texts as “active agents” (Rapley & Rees, 2018) in the development of preschool teacher education. The data were obtained from several places, including the library at the School of Education at the University of Iceland, where books and documents about preschool teacher education in Iceland were gathered from historical texts, including newspaper articles, interviews with pioneers in the field, and academic journals about the development of education. I also researched on the Internet, collecting articles and news about education and steering documents. I consulted with field practice project managers at the University of Akureyri and the University of Iceland, obtaining reports and information about field practice, university homepages, and teachers in the field. The process began by investigating preschool teacher education in general and field practice in preschool teacher education more specifically by examining how their integration (the third space) was presented in the texts. The focus was on field practice, the relationship between theory and practice, connections, and collaboration.

### 5.2.1.2 *Focus groups*

For Studies 2 and 3, focus groups were used for the interviews (Appendix A), involving collaboration and partnership in early childhood teacher education. Using focus groups is considered to be a suitable way to collect data about phenomena, including that regarding collaboration and partnership in early childhood teacher education (Bloor et al., 2001). According to Krueger and Casey (2015), focus group interviews prioritize small groups of people with similar interests, experiences, or characteristics whose data are qualitative and whose discussions can help elucidate the topic under study.

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Bender, 2013) and constructed based on the literature and personal experiences. The interview guide (see Appendix A) was piloted with two preschool teachers to gauge whether they understood the purpose of the study and the topic. To gather the data on the stakeholders' perspectives on the university-preschool collaboration in preschool teacher education, I first asked the participants about their backgrounds and practical field experiences. This was followed by more specific questions, such as their roles in the partnerships and how they experienced the university-preschool collaboration.

Study 3 was an independent extension of Study 2, looking into how mentoring and field practice affected student teachers' learning. During the focus groups, interviewed participants were asked about their own field practice experience both as students (if they had that experience) and as mentors or university-based educators educating students during their field practice. This opening question was estimated to take around four minutes per participant, but it became apparent that the question was relevant to all groups, and they spent more time on this question than some of the key questions.

The focus group interviews spanned 45 to 95 minutes each and took place in a neutral setting. Six out of ten interviews took place in a preschool in the capital area, and four interviews were conducted in a rented apartment in the northern part of Iceland. I had help from an assistant who took notes (see Appendix B) and prepared a summary at the end of each interview. She asked the participants if she had understood the discussions correctly. The assistant and I reviewed and recapped the findings and discussed the group dynamics during the interview.

### 5.2.1.3 Interviews

For Study 4, semi-structured interviews were used (Bender, 2013) and constructed based on the literature on partnership and the third space. The interview guide (Appendix C) was piloted with one university teacher and one preschool teacher to gauge whether they understood the purpose of the study and the topic.

Using semi-structured interviews, the researcher created an outline of the topics to be covered (Jónsdóttir, 2013; Kvale, 2007). This type of interview seeks to give participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of the phenomenon under study. In semi-structured interviews, there is the opportunity to change the form of questions to follow up on explicit answers or stories that are told (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

To gather data on the stakeholders' perspectives on collaboration during field practice in preschool teacher education, I first asked the participants about their experiences of partnership/collaboration in preschool teacher education. These were followed by more specific questions, such as their roles in the partnerships and how they foresaw the future of education and the place of practical education. The interviews spanned 30 to 60 minutes each and took place in the participants' workplaces, except for one, which took place in a meeting room at the library of the School of Education, University of Iceland. At the end of each interview, I prepared a summary asking participants if I had understood their experiences correctly.

## 5.3 Data analysis

The data gathered for each study were analyzed in relation to the research questions. Engeström's (2015) activity system was used as an overarching analysis tool to investigate how participants interacted between systems as well as within them. As explained in Chapter 4.2, I used Engeström's (2015) expansive learning theory to collect and analyze the data to develop the project. I primarily used thematic analyses (Braun & Clark, 2013) in the studies, but in Study 1, historical analyses and descriptive coding were used.

The interviews were analyzed by positioning the study's purpose (Krueger & Casey, 2015) to understand the partnership between preschool teacher education programs and the schools where the students gained practical experience. Before analyzing the data from

Studies 2, 3, and 4, I transcribed the interviews with help from assistants who were familiar with the protocol (to ensure validity). I then listened to them again, familiarizing myself with the tone and hesitations and comparing the typed text, making necessary adjustments.

### **5.3.1 Activity system as a frame for analysis**

Engeström's (2015) activity system was used as an analysis tool in the overall project, particularly regarding subjects, community, division of labor, dialogue, views on collaboration in preschool teacher education, and stakeholders' perceptions of the practicum. The focus was on partially shared objects and the agreed-upon outcome (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). The system was used to understand the context of activities in participants' collaboration. I used the activity system to investigate how participants interacted between systems as well as within them. To start, I drew a picture of the two activity systems—preschools and universities. I redesigned the drawing, adding to the information as the project developed. I added actors in the community, seeing the different partially shared objects and potentially shared objects. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

### **5.3.2 Historical analysis**

In Study 1, historical analysis was used to illuminate records and accounts of the past (Jupp, 2006; Wyche et al., 2006). In general, historical analysis makes sense of the past by finding the traces it leaves behind. Using this method, researchers examine various sources and ensure that the data represents the past, not the present. For the various sources to be reliable, they must be preserved in open archives and available for analysis. Historical analysis is useful in explaining the development of a phenomenon over time (Jupp, 2006; Wyche et al., 2006), for example, the development of preschool teacher education in Iceland. Although it is important not to judge the data retrospectively, it is equally important not to draw a straight line between the past and the present, and conducting a historical analysis helps researchers avoid this tendency (Jupp, 2006; Wyche et al., 2006).

### **5.3.3 Descriptive coding**

Descriptive coding (Saldana, 2016) was used to analyze the data in Study 1. According to Saldana (2016), "Descriptive coding leads

primarily to a categorized inventory, tabular account, summary or index of data's contents" (p. 104). The process began by investigating preschool teacher education in general, and, more specifically, field practice in preschool teacher education. This was done by examining how their integration (the partnership) was presented in the text across different documents. With the overall question of how the third space can become a learning arena, the analysis focused on field practice and the relationship between theory and practice, connections, and collaboration.

### **5.3.4 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis (TA) was used in most of the data analyses, as it can be used to analyze almost any kind of data (Braun & Clark, 2013). In Studies 2, 3 and 4, TA was employed to examine the data and was used under the influence of key concepts of partnership, third space, and mentoring. This was useful in investigating how stakeholders experienced the collaboration among themselves. TA was used to "identify themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to a research question" (Braun and Clarke, 2016, p. 175). I used inductive TA, analyzing the data from the bottom up, using theory and theoretical concepts in analyzing the data. The data in Study 4 were coded using ATLAS.ti 8, from which codes were chosen and themes were identified.

## **5.4 Ethical issues**

In qualitative research, the investigator is a research instrument (Sanjari et al., 2014), and the project is planned and altered as it progresses. Traditionally, research addresses bias and credibility, but during qualitative research, the researcher learns from a series of mistakes that are often considered "an integral part of qualitative research" (Sanjari et al., 2014, p. 2). This was the case in the present project; the research is personal (Patton, 2015), and therefore, my standpoint guided how I collected and analyzed the data.

According to Patton (2015), methods and ethics are intertwined. As previously noted, the research was conducted in connection with two universities in Iceland that teach preschool education; thus, it was difficult to completely conceal the identities of the university teachers, as only a few people teach courses connected to preschool education at both universities. Due to the small population in Iceland,

professionals are well known to each other. Therefore, in Study 3, I could not use the data from university teachers, as it might compromise their identities. Because the universities use different approaches in their partnerships with the field, their data could be traced back to them.

In Study 4, I wanted to interview national-level politicians connected to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, but again, due to the small population of Iceland, there was no way I could conceal the identities of these politicians. Therefore, I decided to interview local politicians, as they are widely dispersed across the country. In this study, as with Studies 2 and 3, it is difficult to completely conceal the identity of the university teachers. However, I have made every effort to safeguard the anonymity of the participants. By using pseudonyms, I have tried to protect their anonymity when reporting the data.

In Studies 2 and 3, the research was introduced in a letter to local municipal authorities stating that I would interview stakeholders in preschool teacher education (see Appendix D). Representatives from the local authority gave their informed consent for the research to be conducted. All participants signed an informed consent document (see Appendices E and F), meaning that they freely chose to participate in the study and understood the researcher's aims and what it meant to be involved. The research was also reported and approved by the Icelandic Data Protection Authority (IDPA). The last study was not reported to the IDPA as the laws changed 2018 (Lög um persónuvernd og vinnslu persónuupplýsinga nr. 90/2018), according to the new laws it is enough if participants give informed consent.

## **5.5 Trustworthiness of the research**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness in qualitative research and social studies refers to the qualities of the findings. To obtain a fuller and richer picture of the phenomenon under study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) and to establish credibility and ensure triangulation, data were collected from different sources, using three different methods to multiply theories in data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flick, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation ensures the quality of the study, and as previously mentioned, I used documentation, focus groups, and individual interviews in the data gathering. During the documentation gathering, I collected information

from multiple sources, asking the same questions. After the interviews of both individuals and focus groups, I prepared a summary and provided the participants an opportunity to comment and make changes if necessary. Analyzing the data, I used different methods, such as Engeström's (2015) activity system, historical analysis, descriptive coding, and thematic analysis, to ensure the quality of the research and to make it possible to tell the stories from different points of view. Using these verification methods, I aimed to make the project trustworthy.

In qualitative research, four terms can be used to determine trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using good practices and presenting the findings to participants of the social world can give the research credibility. Producing detailed descriptions of the research and discussing knowledge transfer leads to transferability. Documenting the research process assures dependability, ensuring that other researchers can read, analyze, and interpret the data set. Confirmability requires dealing honestly with the research topic and being aware of how personal values can affect the construction of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

During the research process, I worked to strengthen the trustworthiness of the project in several ways. I started by acknowledging my own experiences and background as a researcher, as discussed earlier in this chapter. By clarifying my assumptions and standpoint, I sought to strengthen the credibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). As noted, I have been involved in the preschool field and a participant in field practice discussions in preschool teacher education; therefore, it is not unlikely that I tend to become aware of aspects that support my ideas rather than aspects that do not. I was aware of this bias during the research process, especially when analyzing and interpreting data, and I hoped to minimize the impact of any such bias on the findings. I also believe that my interest in and enthusiasm for the topic could be considered as contributing to the research.

I have presented the study nationally and internationally in seminars and conferences, having had the chance to repeatedly reflect, discuss, and revise the four studies, separately as well as the project as a whole.



## **5.6 Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed the research paradigm and my standpoint as a researcher. I also explain why I chose to use qualitative research and how that methodology is in line with the overall project. I discussed different research methods and how I used different data gathering and data analysis techniques. I further considered ethical issues and tried to ensure trustworthiness during the project. I end the chapter by reflecting on the limitations of the project.



## 6 Findings

This project aimed to generate knowledge on how to establish a third space as a learning arena in preschool teacher education. Thus, specific focus was trained on the issues of importance in developing the third space—that is, partnership in preschool teacher education, preschool student teachers’ learning during their field practice, and communication and division of labor among actors. To achieve this goal, four studies were conducted, each of them focusing on partnership in different aspects of teacher education.

### 6.1 Four sub-studies

The main research question—“How can the ‘Third Space’ become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic preschool teacher education?”—is answered by describing the findings of the four studies (see Table 3). The process is divided into four sub-studies. In Study 1, a historical analysis was conducted. In Studies 2 and 3, focus group interviews were conducted, and individual interviews were conducted in Study 4.

**Table 3. Mixed qualitative research methods**

DESCRIPTION	STUDY 1	STUDY 2	STUDY 3	STUDY 4
<b>RESEARCH QUESTION</b>	How have theory and practice been integrated in preschool teacher education in Iceland during different time periods?	What are stakeholders’ perceptions of partnership between preschools and universities, and which aspect of collaboration is most important to them?	How does mentoring influence the professional development of preschool student teachers in their field practice?	What are stakeholder’ experiences and expectations of field practice in preschool teacher education, and how do they perceive their roles?
<b>PARTICIPANT S/DATA</b>	Historical documents	Mentors, university	Mentors, university	Regional policymaker

		teachers, preschool student teachers, and preschool principals	teachers, preschool student teachers, and preschool principals	s, preschool teachers with mentoring education, and university teachers with power and/or influence
<b>RESEARCH CONTEXT</b>	Historical documents	10 focus groups with primary stakeholders to obtain their perspectives on the collaboration between the universities and preschools	10 focus groups with primary stakeholders to obtain their reflections on their field practice experiences	Individual interviews to obtain stakeholders' perspectives on the place of the practical aspect of teacher education
<b>AIM</b>	Mapping how the partnership connecting primary stakeholders was presented in the third space during different time periods, 1946–2015	Mapping the partnership in preschool teacher education among primary stakeholders, November–December 2016	Examining how mentoring affects student teachers' professional rhetoric, and division of labor in the partnership November–December 2016	Mapping the partnership with other stakeholders in preschool teacher education April–June 2019
<b>ANALYSIS METHOD</b>	Historical Analysis	Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis

### 6.1.1 Sub-study 1

The first study was presented in a chapter in an edited book titled *Norwegian and International Teacher Education: Where are we? Where do we want to go? What do we do now?* The chapter's title is "Historical perspective of the third space in Icelandic preschool teacher education," and I am its sole author (see Mörk, 2018). The chapter focuses on how partnership among those who educate preschool

teachers developed, from its beginning until 2015. I mapped out how partnership was presented in the past and investigated if and how the third space was presented during different time periods. This study was an important basis for the further research, as it helped illuminate the history of the two activity systems under examination. Laying out the third space by way of examining theory and practice, the chapter focused on the third space, boundary crossing, and ways of fostering strong collaboration among stakeholders in preschool teacher education in Iceland.

The theoretical framework of the study emphasized the theory of the third space (Bhabha, 1990; Soja, 1996). Moreover, the study built on previous research on the third space in teacher education (Jónsdóttir, 2015; Moje et al., 2004; Zeichner, 2010) and boundary crossing (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Martin et al., 2011; Zeichner, 2010). The main findings of this study showed that the gap between theory and practice in Icelandic preschool teacher education seems to have expanded over the years. This was based on data from documents gathered from several sources—including books and documents about preschool teacher education in Iceland, the Internet, articles and news about education, and steering documents—that were analyzed using descriptive coding (Saldana, 2016).

The data were categorized into themes. This process began to investigate preschool teacher education in general, and field practice in preschool teacher education specifically, by examining how the integration (the third space) was presented in the texts. Thus, the focus of the analysis was on field practice, the relationship between theory and practice, the connections, and the partnership(s). The findings are organized into five time periods. Some periods are discussed more than others because some decades saw many changes in teacher education, while other periods were less influential. Together, the five periods tell the story of the development of preschool teacher education in Iceland from diverse angles, especially in terms of the approaches to third space and partnership. The findings show that the partnership has changed and created a gap between the practice field and the universities, thus affecting the creation of a third space (see Smith, 2016).

### 6.1.2 Sub-study 2

The second study, University-preschool collaboration in preschool student teacher education in Iceland, is presented in a paper (see Mörk, 2021) and is published online in *Learning Environments Research: An International Journal*. The aim of the study was to examine primary stakeholders' views on partnership in early childhood teacher education by determining how they perceive the partnership between preschools and universities as well as what they deem most important about it. The paper relied on theories of partnership in teacher education (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010) and of the third space as a learning environment (Bhabha, 1990; Zeichner, 2010). The data were based on ten focus group interviews with primary stakeholders (preschool student teachers, mentors, university teachers, and preschool principals). The data were sorted into three themes according to the key questions asked in the interviews.

The first theme in Study 2 was the characteristics of the university-preschool partnership. Depending on the stakeholders' position, the partnership was described as either weak or strong. The stakeholders who initiated the partnerships were more informed about its intentions and perceived strong connections, while those who reported experiencing weaker partnership—mentors and students—did not seem to be as informed. The participants generally spoke about the importance of strengthening partnerships through increased collaboration and dialogue among stakeholders.

The second theme in Study 2 was about the participants' role in the partnership. Some participants were uncertain about their role, leading to evident tensions and concerns. Those who knew their role also understood the power of their position and what they could do to either hinder or encourage true partnership.

The third theme in Study 2 dealt with the factors that impact the university-preschool partnership. Participants' general attitudes toward the educational system and the partnership were an element that could either support or hinder partnership. Stakeholders other than the primary stakeholders studied in this research influenced the collaboration and were believed to affect the partnership.

The findings in Study 2 suggested that true partnership does not often occur in preschool teacher education in Iceland. Stakeholders seemed to have little experience of a close partnership, and the findings pointed to a need for them to understand the definitions and

expectations of certain concepts—e.g., partnerships and field practice for the former, and what is expected of them for the latter. The stakeholders seemed to be genuinely interested in improving collaboration and establishing a stronger university-preschool partnership, indicating that dialogue about partnerships and what it means is needed with relevant stakeholders (in addition to primary stakeholders, such as local and national politicians, deans at the universities, and preschool advisors). The findings showed that partnerships play a vital role in offering students access to dialogues between universities and the practice field and between theory and practice in a shared learning environment—a third space—those forms student teachers’ professional development and identities.

### **6.1.3 Sub-study 3**

The third study is an independent extension of Study 2 using data from student teachers, mentors and preschool principals. The study is presented in a chapter in a to-be-published edited book. The chapter title is “Á milli steins og sleggju: Mikilvægi menntunar og fagþróunar leikskólakennaranema í vettvangsnámi” (“Between a rock and a hard place: The importance of education and professional development of preschool student teachers in field practice” [see Mörk & Jónsdóttir, manuscript]). The chapter examined the impact of mentoring on students’ professional development during their field practice and how the partnership among actors affects student teachers’ learning. The chapter focused on the theory of field practice, mentoring in teacher education (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Røys, 2017; Smith, 2015), and the importance of professional rhetoric (Hennum and Østrem, 2016). The chapter also addressed the challenges experienced by preschool student teachers as they balance between being a student while working in a preschool. The data was based on eight focus group interviews with primary stakeholders (preschool student teachers, mentors, university teachers, and preschool principals). Coding the data led to the emergence of four main themes.

The first theme in Study 3, *The mentor’s interest*, addressed the effect mentors have on student teachers. When students were asked to review their field practice experiences, they discussed the impact of mentors on their education. They discussed how mentors’ positive interest or negative attitude toward their work spread to others; such attitudes can also impact students by either encouraging or

discouraging them. Discussions of whether mentors should get paid for guiding students also affected students' well-being. Participants wondered about the quality of the mentoring conversations and whether the projects students brought from the university were too organized and the field sessions too short, leading to little time for reflection. The lack of preschool teachers and their complex role was a topic of discussion among preschool principals, and they wondered if this could affect the mentoring conversations.

The second theme in Study 3, *The mentors' knowledge, and education*, addressed the importance of mentoring education and how it might empower learning opportunities for student teachers. Students discussed whether mentors needed certain criteria—and if so, which criteria—to be able to mentor students. They also discussed how, with mentoring education, students were likely to get comparable guidance during their field practice. Mentors discussed the importance of mentoring education and agreed that mentor training strengthened them as professionals.

The third theme in Study 3, *Double role*, was a concern of all participants. Students experienced tension and guilt concerning the preschool where they worked when they needed to attend courses at the university or visit other preschools during their practice period. These feelings were heightened if they knew that their own preschool had a staff shortage. Principals wondered if the practice periods and the students' assignments were not sufficiently challenging for people with work experience in the field.

The fourth theme in Study 3, *Connection between theory to practice*, addressed the importance of mentoring conversations and guiding students to connect theory with practice. Mentors agreed that if the mentoring conversation were done correctly, it would be the main dialogue for learning. Working students wondered if they would gain deeper knowledge and engage in discussion through guidance in their workplace.

The findings in Study 3 showed the importance of mentoring and how guidance—either bad or good—affected the professional development and professionalism of preschool student teachers. The connection between mentoring and the professional rhetoric of preschool teachers was also apparent in the findings. The findings also revealed that students experienced tension in their studies, within the preschool where they worked, and with other stakeholders, such as university teachers and mentors.



#### **6.1.4 Sub-study 4**

The fourth study, Field practice increases professionalism: Collaboration with preschool students' teachers field practice, is in process (see Mörk & Jónsdóttir, manuscript). The study focused on stakeholders' views of field practice, their collaborative practices, and their stance on future goals for developing the field practice of preschool student teachers. Qualitative interviews were conducted with the majority-party municipal policymakers serving on educational councils, preschool teachers specializing in mentoring programs, and university teachers with authority or influence over field practice in some way. The paper focused on the theory of partnership (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016), and partnership in the third space (Zeichner, 2010).

The findings demonstrated three themes: interaction between partners, professional development in field practice, and shared purpose: promoting professionalism at work.

The first theme addressed stakeholders' experiences with collaboration or partnership, and the findings revealed that consultation and collaboration among the stakeholders have been insufficient. Participants reported a limited flow of information and discussed how decisions were often made by other stakeholders instead of themselves. For example, according to the municipal policymakers, the universities and the Ministry of Education and Culture made decisions but tasked the policymakers with implementing them. Policymakers said they trusted professionals working on educational councils to collaborate with other stakeholders on their behalf. Those findings underscored the importance of reinforcing collaboration, involving school offices in such collaboration, and, consequently, building a third space. Participants also proposed initiating dialogues between actors in different systems and as a way to enhance their collaboration.

The second theme addressed participants' attitudes toward field practice. Most participants appreciated field practice, even if the students' teachers were working at another preschool at the same time. University teachers and mentors agreed that through field practice, students could experiment, receive support, and reflect on theory and practice. One university teacher and one mentor stressed the importance of also allowing teachers in training the opportunity to be students. Some participants endorsed paid internships and

approved the length of the study program, whereas policymakers feared that preschool teacher education was lengthy, and they were concerned that this might reduce the appeal among prospective students.

The third theme revealed that all the stakeholders interviewed here (policymakers, mentors, and university teachers) emphasized preschool professionalism and preschool student teachers' education. Each system has a partially shared objective: The university prepares student teachers by teaching theory and reflection; preschool teacher mentors connect theory to practice, and the local department of education makes educational contracts with those who attend the program. All participants wanted the same outcome: professionalism in preschools.

### **6.1.5 Synthesis of the four sub-studies**

The third space is intertwined with the partnership, as it is a crucial part of a space that rests on hybridity. Findings from all four studies show that to construct a learning arena with the focus on the third space, the foundation must be strengthened. The last three studies indicated the need to build and strengthen true partnership, starting with dialogue between actors. Evidence from Studies 2 and 3 showed that the partnership affects student teachers' learning.

The findings in Studies 1 and 2 further indicate the need to focus on creating a non-hierarchical partnership, where theory and practice are regarded equally in education. In the last three studies, actors' needs to discuss their roles and what is expected of the partnership were evident as these are important factors in the creation of the third space. According to the findings in all four studies, partnership in the examined contexts is separated, and systems connected to preschool teacher education work with partially shared objects. Therefore, there is a need and willingness to develop the partnership with a focus on shared objects.

Boundary crossing is needed in the creation of a shared learning arena, where actors can discuss their collaboration. The findings suggest that the dialogue between actors and boundary crossing is lacking and needs to be strengthened. The last three studies also showed the need for more stakeholders than the initial actors (preschool teacher students, mentors, preschool principals, and university teachers) to be involved in the formation of the third space.

Additional stakeholders were added in the last study (majority-party municipal policymakers serving on educational councils and university teachers with authority or influence over field practice in some way) to gain a fuller picture of how the systems interact. The findings from that study showed the need to create a learning platform.

The complicated positions of most preschool student teachers in Iceland have developed over the last three decades; however, during this period, education has changed, although the students' positions and the educational changes do not seem to go hand-in-hand. First, the findings indicate that changes focused more on the theoretical aspects, while in the next two studies, participants discussed their feelings that education was designed for on-campus students with little work experience. The reality, however, is that the majority of students work full time and have a lot of work experience. The last study shows that stakeholders are aware of the situation and prepared to revise the partnership with a focus on student teachers' educational needs.

The findings of the four studies are interwoven and reflect each other in certain areas. In summary, participants found it important to build good partnerships, involve more stakeholders, and strengthen the collaboration between the field and the universities, with the overall goal of ensuring professionalism in all stakeholders in the early childhood sector. They saw this as an important factor in creating a shared learning platform. In the next chapter, the significance of these findings is discussed in greater detail, as well as what this new knowledge means in relation to previous knowledge and how it can be adapted to future preschool teacher education.



## **7 Discussion**

The overall findings of the research are discussed in relation to previous research on partnership, third space, and teacher education, as well as Engeström's (2016) three dimensions of expansion of the objects that were identified. The synthesis of the four sub-studies points at the main findings: separated partnership, boundary crossing, and partially shared objects – with dialogue being the red thread in reaching the goals.

Section 7.1 addresses how moving from a separated to a cooperative partnership can lay the foundation for the third space. In Section 7.2, I discuss the importance of boundary crossing in the formation of the third space, and in Section 7.3, I reflect on how systems can move from partially shared objects to dimensions of expansion, focusing on strengthening the partnership. Section 7.4 addresses the new model and how it can be used to create a learning arena in preschool teacher education. Lastly, I reflect on the main question: "How can the 'third space' become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic preschool teacher education?" I further address how these findings can answer that question.

### **7.1 Moving from a separated to a cooperative partnership**

The findings in all studies showed that partnership in preschool teacher education in Iceland is separated. The first study showed that the education has changed during the decades, moving from cooperative to separated, and the next three studies showed that most stakeholders felt that they had little to say in the partnership.

Given this knowledge, the suggestion would be to strengthen the partnership and strive to move from a separated to a more cooperative partnership. This is essential if the aim is to build a third space as a learning arena (Smith, 2016). Previous research proposes that partnership in teacher education should place emphasis on improved education for student teachers, as it provides student teachers with high-quality education (Helleve & Ulvik, 2019). Emphasizing student teachers' professional learning creates a

successful partnership (Lillejord and Børte, 2016), especially if the partnership is formed with common interests and visions (Passy et al., 2018; Sewell et al., 2018). Previous research indicates that collaborative partnerships enable partners to construct their learning and interaction and enhance their professional growth (Grudnoff et al., 2017).

Participants in Studies 2, 3, and 4 expressed their desire for a stronger connection and more dialogue between actors. As previous research shows, discussions among partners, where they are encouraged to rethink and recreate the partnership (Smith, 2016), negotiate identities, and cross boundaries, facilitates the creation of a hybrid space, where knowledge from practice and theory is combined (Daza et al., 2021). Dialogue has been found to be an important factor in the creation of the third space and in strengthening the partnership, as feelings of belonging support the collaboration (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016).

According to Helleve and Ulvik (2019), those who have formal education in mentoring are more likely to see themselves as teacher educators and feel equal in the partnership. In Study 3, participants discussed the importance of the mentor's role as well the need for formal mentoring education. Participants also considered that students were not given equal opportunities during their field practice because of mentors' skills as teacher educators. Mentoring during the field practice and developing knowledge during the practicum boost the student teachers' confidence and professional learning. This is connected to collaboration and collegiality, as it supports equal learning (Nolan & Molla, 2018). As findings from Studies 2, 3, and 4 show, the majority of the students work full time along with their studies, and this double position makes them feel torn between the systems. Therefore, as previous research has shown, when designing a learning arena, this knowledge must be taken into consideration, and students' educational and practical backgrounds should be a part of the action plan (Nyckel et al., 2020).

Findings in Studies 2 and 3 also showed that students felt the tension in the partnership, and this affected their learning (Levin, 2012). When actors are unsure about their role in the partnership, it can lead to problems and conflicts (Halvorsen, 2014), and if the division of labor and communication is absent, it can create tension in the partnership (Ngueyn, 2020). To decrease power struggles and

tension, Lillejord and Børte (2016) conclude that it is important to acknowledge that actors in the partnership participate based on different perspectives. They also emphasize the importance of helping students as future teachers and focus on their opportunities to connect theory with practice (Lillejord & Børte, 2016), actors can create a learning community. Clark (2019) found that this can be accomplished with a platform that embraces both practical and theoretical knowledge.

## **7.2 Moving across boundaries in the creation of the third space**

Evidence of the importance of boundary crossing was found in all studies. The first study showed that creating a learning arena where actors could cross boundaries might be a way to bridge the gap that seems to have formed during past decades. The findings in the next three studies also showed the need for actors to cross boundaries and have an open dialogue regarding their expectations in the partnership. By creating an adaptive joint supervision or a learning environment without hierarchy and using dialogue, the groundwork for a strong partnership is prepared (Klein et al., 2016; Steele, 2017).

The last three studies supported the idea that relationships were influenced by power relations, and that most of the participants were unsure of their roles in the partnership. Previous findings have shown that the argumentative pattern of interaction can provide balance in power relations, where the focal point is on acknowledging differences between institutional cultures (Ben-Harush & Orland-Barak, 2019). When preparing to build a mutual learning arena and cross institutional boundaries, it is important to look at the cultural context of each activity system (Chan, 2020; Gupta, 2019; Lee, 2018). As Clark (2019) found, it is important to acknowledge that crossing institutional borders is not always easy, and the creation of the third space will face distinct obstacles.

Crossing boundaries and creating a hybrid space was an apparent need according to the last three studies. Participants discussed the need for dialogue to review what was expected from the partnership and to understand how to move forward as partners. Rethinking the partnership lays the foundation for a true partnership (Smith, 2016). Professional engagement is enhanced when all actors work together

toward the same goal, structuring the partnership (Grudnoff et al., 2017).

In Study 2, preschool principals discussed their roles in the partnership, and the two groups did not have the same experience in the collaboration. The principals who understood the intentions behind the partnership were confident in their roles in the collaboration, which represented strong intentionality (Halvorsen, 2014). They viewed themselves as figurative tunnels occupying the powerful position of either hindering or encouraging partnership. According to Passy et al. (2018), support from leaders and institutions in the partnership and during the boundary crossing is essential, so actors can commit the time and energy that is needed (Passy et al., 2018). Previous findings support this, as boundary crossing rarely succeeds without support (Lillejord & Børte, 2016).

Boundary crossing requires leadership, and the boundary crosser's role is to aid in the merging and integrating of actors who are crossing institutional boundaries (Jackson & Burch, 2019). As Zeichner (2010) mentions, some of the debates a leader must mediate are power struggles due to group dynamics and assumptions and ideas about what knowledge is most valuable, as evident in Studies 2 and 3.

### **7.3 Moving from partially shared object to expansion in the learning**

To determine if expansion in learning has occurred, it is necessary to see whether the objects of the involved activity systems have expanded. According to Engeström (2001; 2016), three important dimensions of expansion can be identified: the social-spatial dimension, the temporal dimension, and the political-ethical dimension.

In the socio-spatial dimension, two challenges might occur. The first challenge addresses who is learning. In Studies 2 and 3, it was clear that preschool student teachers were the ones learning, but the challenge consisted in the transition from the individual to the inclusion of more learners (Engeström, 2016). In an examination of the findings, it became apparent that the formation of the third space would not be linear (Klein et al., 2013), nor could it be implemented before all actors fully understood the foundation of the partnership (Smith, 2016). Therefore, in the second challenge, which asks where learning occurs for the preschool student teachers and other actors, it



was evident that the overall object, not just partially shared objects, needs to be addressed and divided into different objects along the way (Engeström, 2016). As stated previously, each system has its own partially shared object: The university's object is to teach theory and reflection to the students; the preschool's object is to teach the students to reflect on theory and connect it with practice, and the department of education's object is to ensure that student teachers working for the municipality attend the study during working hours. When looking at the data and the findings, it became clear that to reach the potential of the third space, other objects needed to be expanded as well, starting with the partnership and the definitions of the concepts used (Engeström, 2016; Smith, 2016).

In the temporal dimension, the timeframe of learning is questioned and the restrictions (e.g., on lessons taught at the university and/or curriculum) in both systems are challenged (Engeström, 2016). The third challenge deals with how to change the knowledge transition from a restrictive focus on learning in lessons to possibly finding a different rhythm of learning that is not restricted to lessons but is more long-term oriented (Engeström, 2016; Klein et al., 2016). Here, the question is: How do actors learn across each system, and how do they cross the boundaries? The findings in all studies indicate that the partnership is what can be called "separated" (Smith, 2016). Thus, the third space seems to be invisible, but actors stated that they would like to improve the partnership and create a learning arena with a focus on dialogue (Moje et al., 2004; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010).

In the political-ethical dimension, challenge four asks what is learned and why, which leads to the need to question the action and content of learning (Engeström, 2016). As participants in the last three studies discussed, a shared learning community needs to be created where actors can take part in the innovation of the learning content (Engeström, 2016; Halvorsen, 2014). This dimension deals with the social impact of learning. In Study 4, stakeholders discussed the importance of education for the social and educational needs (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011) for all actors involved in the field of early childhood education in Iceland. Participants in Studies 2, 3, and 4 shared that they wanted the partnership to change so learners could be agents of change (Engeström, 2016) or boundary crossers. Looking into the action that needs to be taken to prepare a third space, there is a need

to look at the traditional division of labor within the system and the tools used in the partnership. Also, the content of learning is an essential factor in this dimension, and as Hennem and Østrem (2016) suggest that encouraging preschool teachers' opportunities to share their knowledge and expertise could be a way to strengthen the profession leading to more assertive professionals in the practice field.

In Table 4, the expansions of objects in all three dimensions are summarized.

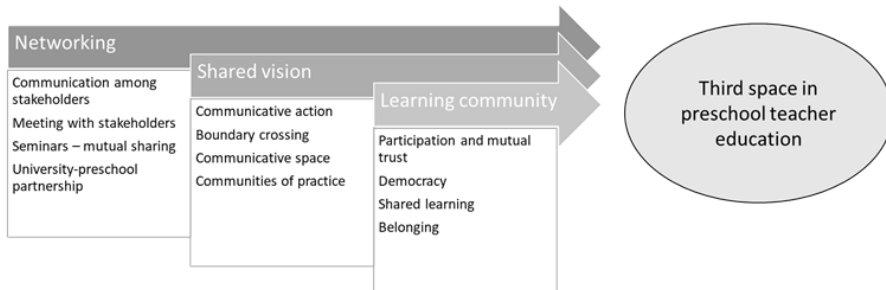
Table 4. Expansions of objects in all three dimensions

	<b>Socio-spatial dimension</b>	<b>Temporal dimension</b>	<b>Political-ethical dimension</b>
<b>Expansion of object</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared learning</li> <li>• Creating a shared object, the creation of the third space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a different rhythm of learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agents of change (boundary crossers)</li> </ul>

In the socio-spatial dimension, the object of expansion is moving from working mostly with partially shared objects to working with a shared object. The findings suggest that stakeholders would like to work further within a partnership, and the shared object would be building a true partnership. In this collaboration, communicative action and communicative space (Kemmis et al., 2014) could be used to create a third space as a learning platform—leading to the temporal dimension, where actors can create a different rhythm of learning with tools from the socio-spatial dimension. Intertwined is the political-ethical dimension, as it is linked in each activity system's rules and regulations and is a large part of the professionalism of actors in early childhood education.

## 7.4 Partnership in the third space

As a summary of the discussion, I present a model that can be used while building true partnership (see Figure 10).



**Figure 10 True partnership in the third space**

In each phase, there are characteristics to guide the process; it is not necessary to break the process into steps, but it might help when actors begin the process. Below I will discuss each phase, starting with networking. As discussed previously, partnership during field practice in teacher education has been found important to create a better education for student teachers (Simonsen, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). If actors want to move from separated to cooperative (presented as left to right in Smith's [2016] continuum), preparation of the groundwork by the actors makes a significant difference. According to Halvorsen (2014), partnerships that begin with a clear vision and strong intentions are more likely to be democratic. The university might start by mapping potential partners or what is essential in the partnership as it looks into what is needed to teach student teachers. However, it might be more effective to listen to actors in the field and apply their expertise when preparing students for field practice. Hennem and Østrem's (2016) definition of the profession and the importance of the professional rhetoric is a crucial factor that needs to be addressed in this phase. Encouraging preschool teachers to communicate and explain their work, emphasizing the ethics of professionalism as those factors can affect collaboration with others. One way to do this might be to work with potential partners to prepare mutual seminars where actors present their knowledge and skills. After the seminar, partners

can discuss whether they would like to create a university-preschool partnership. For a partnership to be successful, it is important that it is structured according to the dynamics between the participants, with a focus on enabling and strengthening professionalism in teacher education (Lillejord & Børte, 2016).

While the foundation for a true partnership is being laid, mutual understanding is necessary, as it is fundamental for building shared visions. One way to lay this groundwork could be communicative actions (Kemmis et al., 2014), which entail principles and agreements among people working together to understand others' views and achieve mutual understanding. Such actions also involve actors agreeing on how to proceed or interact when developing learning experiences for student teachers (Lemon et al., 2018; Passy et al., 2018). In the second phase, boundary crossing is an important aspect in forming the partnership (Akkerman & Bakker 2011; Wenger, 1998).

When actors have designed and prepared principles of communicative action, the effect is an open space where participants in conversation can expand their dialogue, share ideas, and take their progress seriously (Kemmis et al., 2014). This is what Wenger (1998) refers to as community of practice, a means by which actors develop, negotiate, share ideas, and work toward a mutual agreement.

In the third phase of the creation of the third space, Halvorsen's (2014) four resources that support true partnership could be used to create a feeling of belonging in the partnership. In this phase, flexibility and vitality are the dominant resources. If the unforeseen is approached as a challenge and if mutual trust exists among the partners, partnership can be reinforced (Halvorsen, 2014). In this sense, flexibility is an important aspect of collaboration in partnerships since participants join for various reasons. If participants free themselves from ingrained habits and rituals, new ideas can emerge, and innovation, creativity, and engagement are likely to materialize (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010). Dialogue and social connections seem to play a major role in collaboration, and the feeling of belonging—based on actors' ability or inability to shape meaning (in this case, concepts, and shared visions)—affects how they understand their own identity in the partnership (Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2016; Wegner, 1998).

The findings strongly suggest there is a need to strengthen the partnership by crossing boundaries, emphasizing dialogue while

discussing mutual objects in preschool teacher education. Using this model helps lay the foundation of true partnership, supporting actors while crossing boundaries and creating opportunities for dialogue while establishing the shared learning arena.

## 7.5 Summary

The theoretical foundation of the research is sociocultural constructivism, where the focus is on learning, using Engeström's (2015; 2016) activity theory. Sociocultural constructivism focuses on the context and how people work and live by asking questions, discussing issues, and interacting. According to sociocultural constructivism, students are active learners, and when given a chance, they will take responsibility for their learning and knowledge. Community plays a vital role in the knowledge-building process for the students. Therefore, it is essential to be active members of the activity system as learning transforms individuals and in their social world (Stauffacher et al., 2006).

As discussed in Chapter 3.3, Engeström's (2001) activity system can be used as a sociocultural and sociohistorical window to society when analyzing human activity in the realms of learning and working. When looking at an activity system to see how the partnership is between two or more systems, it is essential to notice that there are two primary layers in the division of labor. One layer is within the system, and the other layer is between systems. How labor is divided between systems is based on different objects (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Using the activity system is like peeling an onion; with each layer, you get closer to the underlying conflicts that have manifested and prevented the partnership or collaboration. In this project, the focus was on how actors experienced the interaction. This is an essential factor in studying the activity system, as it cannot be understood if it is analyzed outside its environmental context. When analyzing the interaction between systems, it is also vital to notice that looking at the activities and the participants (Engeström, 2016; Leontèv, 1981).

Focusing on true partnership (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016) as necessary in the creation of the third space (Bhabha, 1990; Zeichner 2010), it is essential to recognize that every system has its history, culture, tools, and ways of communicating, which affect the development of new knowledge that combines knowledge from other spaces (Engeström, 2015). Kemmis et al.'s (2014) communicative space

can be used to create a shared learning arena. In this space, participants take communicative action while engaging in open dialogue about the concept or problem they are working on. This could be the first step in creating the third space; by consciously deciding what goal should be reached, determining how to reach it, and agreeing to participate in the conversation, partners open a communicative space among themselves. The third space is not linear, and according to Klein et al. (2013), it can be messy and complicated. In the hybrid space, where actors come together and initiate a dialogue on how they would like the partnership to develop (Bhabha, 1990; Zeichner, 2010), the third space is created by taking time and showing effort, merging energy and expertise from each system and every actor.

The overall findings from the four sub-studies aim to answer the main question: How can “the Third Space” become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic preschool teacher education? The simple answer would be that the third space is formed by improving the partnership and focusing on moving the collaboration from separated to a cooperative. Answering each sub-question concludes that using the contradictions among the activity systems and looking into the interplay and clash of the systems, would help create a shared object. The expansive approach would entail finding and developing the learning platform that appears as a conditional new opening (Engeström, 2016). Chapter 9 presents suggestions for third space interactions for the Icelandic context in preschool teacher education partnership.

## **8 Conclusions**

In this final chapter, I consider the contribution the research makes to the educational field. I discuss the limitation of the research, and lastly, I offer some recommendations for practice and further research.

### **8.1 Intended contribution of the research**

The aim of the project was to examine the extent and quality of the partnership in preschool teacher education in Iceland. The goal was to find ways to improve and strengthen various levels in education for actors involved in preschool teacher education, especially focusing on student teachers, and the focus was on important issues for building the third space during field practice.

The contribution of this project is threefold. First, the project is intended to contribute to theoretical knowledge regarding third space and partnership in preschool teacher education, an issue that has not been at the forefront in preschool teacher education studies, specifically not in Iceland. In the past decade, research has shown that creating a learning environment—i.e., the third space—is important because it may reinforce future teachers' education as well as allow them to reflect on how the theoretical knowledge they acquire is relevant to practice and how practice supports theory (Clark, 2019; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010). The first study contributes to knowledge on the formation of partnership through the years in preschool teacher education in Iceland. The historical dimension of collaboration and what the third space is and has been during the field practice are considered through an analysis of documents. Studies 2 and 4 also contribute to the knowledge on partnership in preschool teacher education and the factors that are needed to strengthen the formation of the third space.

Second, as the context of the project is Iceland, the project contributes to the Icelandic and international discourse on preschool teacher education and policy. As mentioned earlier, little has been written about the issue, and the discussion in Iceland frequently centers on whether students are committed to their studies or whether their work takes greater priority (the majority of preschool

student teachers at the University of Iceland work during their studies [Björnsdóttir et al., 2019]). The discussion also centers on whether an organized field practice is needed for those who are working while studying. The literature emphasizes the importance of connecting theory to practice (Fitchett et al., 2018; Keiler et al., 2020; Nolan & Molla, 2018), but it gives no indication that students who are already working are unable to connect theory to their own practice if they are provided proper mentoring and guidance (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Smith, 2015). A current policy issue in Iceland is strengthening the teaching profession in Iceland, and one of the changes was to offer a paid internship to student teachers last school year. Studies 2 and 4 builds on an investigation into partnership in preschool teacher education and how stakeholders perceive the collaboration. These studies contribute to knowledge about the university-preschool partnership and how it affects student teachers' learning.

Third, and above all, the intention of the project is to contribute to professionalism in preschool teacher education. As mentioned earlier, no research has been conducted on mentoring and field practice in preschool teacher education in Iceland. Additionally, as previous findings show (Eik, 2014; Einarsdóttir et al., 2013), the profession needs to be strengthened. Studies also show that focusing on strengthening the rhetoric during the practicum could be a way to reinforce the profession.

## **8.2 Limitations of the research**

This project has several limitations that are important to note. First, the research was small in scale, studying a profession that (as discussed in Chapter 2) is short of preschool teachers. Most professionals in the field know each other, and the two universities can be compromised, making it difficult to completely conceal the identity of the participants. Since the country is small in population, most of the respondents know the other respondents, which prevented me from providing a richer description of the context and participants as I sought to maintain their anonymity. Due to my experience and former work in the field, as well as my experience as an educator in preschool teacher education, some of the participants were my former colleagues or students; they might have been aware of my interest in and attitude toward partnership in field practice, which may have influenced their responses in strengthening the partnership. In



addition, the snowball sampling in Studies 2 and 3 may have grouped participants with similar attitudes on the topic. Keeping this in mind, one must be careful about making any generalizations based on these findings.

### **8.3 Further research**

From the data, it is clear that stakeholders in preschool teacher education in Iceland want to strengthen the collaboration and build up partnership focusing on dialogue. The current research revealed that partnership in preschool teacher education is separated. The findings raise questions about further research on involvements and actors' roles in the partnership. This is especially important considering the quality of the partnership and how a separated partnership seems to affect the students' teachers during the practice period. Longitudinal studies are needed on the formation of the third space and how true partnership affects preschool teacher education. Such research should also focus on how actors' cross boundaries.

This research also reveals that the roles of Icelandic preschool student teachers are complex, that mentors' education is important in student teacher's professional development, as well as the importance of true partnership during the education. The findings raise questions about further research on the role of the mentor during the field practice. This is especially important in light of the fact that the profession needs to be strengthened. Nationally, there is a gap in this knowledge in the field of education, and this study is the first of its kind to be conducted in preschool teacher education. Exploring how mentors impact student teachers' professional rhetoric during the practicum in a long-term study is necessary.

### **8.4 Closing words**

Student teachers' well-being, along with their learning opportunities, should be of interest in preschool teacher education. In this project the aim was to research if the third space could be used as a learning arena in preschool teacher education. Looking into the theory-practice gap in Iceland, the findings show that challenging issues and unclear division of labor between the actors prevent joint discussion and true partnership. These findings can serve as useful information for policymakers in preschool teachers' education, administrators, and other professionals in the field. Moreover, it is important to continue

to search for new ways to support student teachers, as the findings show that the separated partnership and conflicts between the practice field and the universities affect student teachers' learning opportunities.

## 9 Epilogue

After rereading the whole thesis, I realize that some aspects of my work require further explanation to improve the quality. Therefore, with the useful comments of the examiners in mind while working on this epilogue, I hope this chapter gives a clearer picture of the project.

I want to start by explaining why I chose to present the findings from the two universities as one. Iceland is a small country, and the community of preschool teacher educators know one another well, and the programs at the two universities are easily recognizable. Every report with the data can be revealing due to its small size and the connection among professionals. After consultation with my supervisors, it was decided that it would be more ethical to work with the data as one dataset without pointing to one specific university.

The structure of this epilogue starts with an overview of preschool teacher education in both universities under study, both from the school year 2016–2017 and how it is currently, 2021–2022. As I previously explained in Chapter 2, there have been changes in preschool teacher education, and the paid internship was an option from the school year 2019–2020 (Appendix G shows a visual summary of how preschool teacher education has changed through the years). The findings reflect the full data material so that the universities and participants remain anonymous. Moreover, I will use X and Y for the universities in this epilogue.

Next, I situate the data from the four articles presenting boundary objects, examining the contradictions within the systems, division of labor, rules, and instruments, and how I used these findings in the articles and in creating the model.

Last, I propose different types of third spaces as interventions. I end the chapter with summary.

### 9.1 The context of the Icelandic educational system in preschool teacher education

In Iceland, preschool teacher education is a five-year master's study, comprising three years of bachelor's education (180 ECST) and a two-year postgraduate education at the master's level (120 ECST) (Háskóli Íslands, 2020; Háskólinn & Akureyri, 2020a; Act on the Education, Competency, and Recruitment of Teachers and Administrators of

Preschools, Compulsory Schools, and Upper Secondary Schools (no. 95/2019)). In both universities, the admission criteria are the Icelandic stúdentsspróf (matriculation exam) or equivalent. A grade of 7.25 (the highest grade in Iceland is 10) or above is required to be admitted to the program. Graduation requirements are Master of Teaching, which gives the students the right to apply for further studies at master's level or Educational Studies (M.Ed.) and Educational Science (M.A), which next, gives the students an opportunity to apply for doctoral studies. In addition, the masters' graduation gives the students authorization to use the professional title Teacher according to the Act of Education no. 95/2019. (Háskóli Íslands, 2021; Háskólinn á Akureyri, 2021).

### **9.1.1 Practicum**

Universities collaborate with preschools that are paid to receive students. The schools are paid according to the length of time students spend in school. The preschool-based mentors do not get paid directly from the universities, but rather, the preschool principals decide how the money is distributed. It is common for mentors to get paid, but some preschools prefer to include the money in the school's budget. Universities inquire whether preschools are interested in and capable of accepting students during their practice period. If a preschool accepts, the principal chooses a mentor. Most mentors receive one or two students during practice periods. Mentors must have the license to teach (previously, one had to be a preschool teacher, see Chapter 2.2) and a minimum of three years of working experience in a preschool. However, this is not always the case, as there is a shortage of preschool teachers. In some cases, the only preschool teacher is the principal, and given their position, it may be difficult to mentor and guide students while running the schools. Candidates who live in rural areas find it difficult to find a mentor. I know of one case where the student worked and lived in one area and the mentor in another. They met once a week, either onsite or in a zoom meeting, to discuss the student's progress, projects, and performance. When similar situations are faced, the universities find solutions.

The universities send a handbook to the mentors to guide them on how to best mentor the students and to explain what is expected from both the mentors and students. They also receive information about projects students are required to perform during their field practice. Mentors are expected to meet the students during practice to discuss and reflect on the practicum. The mentor and the student agree at the

beginning of the practice period on how the time will be spent and organize when they meet to discuss progress and reflect on what has been learned. At the end of the practice period, the mentor sends an evaluation to the university, but before that is done, the mentor discusses the evaluation with the student, allowing them to provide feedback and discuss what went well and what needs to be changed in the performance.

During the paid internship that spans over a whole school year (two semesters), students are given a minimum of six hours per month to meet with their mentors in a mentoring dialogue. The two universities approach the internship differently. Students at University X who choose the paid internship are given assignments during their internship. In contrast, University Y connects the paid internship to a course in which the students learn how to use action research in their practice. In the paid practicum, it is emphasized that principals should not act as mentors, as it would alter the mentoring process to resemble that of peer mentoring rather than a mentor/student practicum.

In Tables 5 and 6, I summarize the practicum during the two periods, 2016–2017 and 2021–2022, relative to each university. The ECTS units for the practicum are the differences between the two universities. University X has a clear field practice, connecting projects from courses to practice periods. In contrast, University Y's field practice is interwoven with courses in its preschool teacher education, where students perform their projects connected to their assignments in their courses. Both universities have short practice periods in their bachelor studies.

**Table 5 Courses taught at the universities with connection to practicum 2016–2017**

University X			University Y		
Courses taught Fall 2016 with connection to the practicum	Courses taught Spring 2017 with connection to the practicum	ECST	Courses taught Fall 2016 with connection to the practicum	Courses taught Spring 2017 with connection to the practicum	ECST
2 in B.Ed. 15 ECST in total	8 in B.Ed. 6 ECST in total	21	7 in B.Ed. 12 ECST in total	8 in B.Ed. 18 ECST in total	30
2 in M.Ed. 30 ECST in	0 in M.Ed. 0 ECST in	30	2 in M.Ed. 10 ECST in	3 in M.Ed. 14 ECST in	24

total	total		total	total	
-------	-------	--	-------	-------	--

**Table 6 Courses taught at the universities with connection to practicum 2021-2022**

University X		EC TS	University Y		ECTS
Courses taught Fall 2021 with connection to the practicum	Courses taught Spring 2022 with connection to the practicum		Course s taught Fall 2021 with connection to the practicum	Courses taught Spring 2022 with connection to the practicum	
4 in B.Ed. 0 ECST in total	4 in B.Ed. 6. ECTS in total	6	1 in B.Ed. 2 ESCT in total	6 in B.Ed. 18 ECTS in total	20
2 in M.Ed./M.T. 20 ECTS in total	1 in M.Ed./M.T. 10 ECTS in total	30	2 in M.Ed./M.T. * 10 ECTS 4 ECTS **	2 in M.Ed./M.T.* 12 ECTS 2 ECTS **	22** * 28** **

\* 1 course is for students with other bachelor's degrees

\*\* 4 ECTS in the course for students with another bachelor's degree

\*\*\* Total 22 ECTS for students with B.Ed.

\*\*\*\* Total 28 ECTS for students with another bachelor's degree

As can be noticed, there are some differences in the practicums between the universities. The total ECTS units were reduced in the last five years in both universities. In University X, it was reduced from 17% to 12%, and University Y from 18% to 15%.

### 9.1.2 Participants and their relation to the universities

As I explained in Chapter 5, the participants in the project were all directly or indirectly connected to preschool teacher education. I started by interviewing focus groups with initial stakeholders, including preschool student teachers, preschool mentors, preschool principals, and university teachers. Later, I added other stakeholders, including majority-party municipal policymakers serving on educational councils

and university teachers with authority or influence over field practice. In Table 7, the participants relative to the universities are presented.

**Table 7 Participants situated relative to the universities**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>University X</b>	<b>University Y</b>	<b>Connected to both universities</b>
<b>Students</b>	9	9	
<b>University-based educators</b>	4	3	
<b>Preschool based mentors</b> (working in preschools and stationed there)	2	4	The mentors had experiences working with both universities
<b>Preschool principals</b>	6	5	The principals had experiences working with both universities
<b>Municipal policymakers</b>			4
<b>Mentors with a postgraduate degree</b> (these are NOT the same as above)	2	2	The mentors had experiences working with both universities
<b>Responsible university teachers</b> (these are NOT the same as above)	2	2	

## 9.2 Activity system as an analyzing tool

The overall project aimed to generate knowledge on how to form a third space as a learning arena in preschool teacher education in Iceland and reflect on whether a third space could be a solution to strengthen partnerships in preschool teacher education. This section presents how I analyze the data with Engeström's (2015) activity system using Figure 7 (p. 47). The system was used to understand the context of participants' collaboration activities and how participants interacted between and within systems. I start this section by looking

into participants in the project, dividing them according to Engeström's (2015) triangle into activity systems according to the subjects (student teachers, preschool principals, preschool-based mentors, university teachers, and politicians) with the focus on field practice. I present tools, rules, community, and division of labor within the activity and boundary objects found in the studies.

Study 1 was a historical analysis, looking into the history of preschool teacher education in Iceland from the beginning, 1946 to the year 2015. Studies 2 and 3 (conducted in November and December 2016) are interviews with focus groups, interviewing student teachers, preschool-based mentors, preschool principals, and university teachers. In Study 4 (conducted from April to June 2019), I had individual interviews with university teachers, mentors with a postgraduate degree, and municipality policymakers. When I was collecting the data for Study 4, the paid internship was still being designed; thus, I will not discuss it here.

Furthermore, supported by the data, I suggest possibilities for creating third spaces in Icelandic teacher education. Moreover, I present a suggestion for how preschool-based mentors and university-based mentors can strengthen their collaboration. In the next sections, each subject activity system is presented in detail.

### **9.2.1 Student teachers**

#### Tools/instruments

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Assignments from the universities reflect the foundation of the practicum, what the students should learn, and how, e.g., they are learning about play using the project approach, pedagogical documentation, or learning stories (Are they studying curriculum or professionalism, etc.?)
  - Each university has its own handbook (the same handbook for students and mentors)
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - Emails from the university to the practice field
  - Preparation for the assignments conducted during the practicum



- Weekly meeting with the mentors discussing how the practicum is going

### Rules

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Five-year master's study (300 ECTS units)
    - Total ECTS units in practicum are 36 units at University X and 44 units at University Y
  - Contracts with municipalities
  - Payments from preschools during field practice and on-site courses
  - Universities plan the practicum
  - Universities contact preschools
  - Preschool principals choose mentors for the students
  - Payment from the universities to the practice field
  - National curriculum
  - Preschool curriculum
  - Daily schedule in the preschool
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - Contracts with municipalities, yet they feel torn in their double role
  - Payments from the preschools during field practice and on-site courses
  - Some principals let the students know that they add to the workload in the preschool while attending the study

### Community

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Universities
  - Department of education in each municipality
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - University teachers
  - Preschool principals
  - Mentors
  - Co-workers

- Peers in preschool teacher education
- Children at the preschools where they work
- Children during practicum (with whom they try out their teaching)

#### Division of labor

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Universities plan the practicum
  - University teachers in University Y prepare assignments for students connected to courses they teach
  - The project manager in University X is in contact with the practice field and university teachers
  - The principals choose mentors
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - Students do what is expected of them
    - Being respectful
  - Learning from mentors and peers
  - Work on assignments during practice

#### Expected outcome of the activity

- Learning to connect theory to practice during the practicum

#### Boundary objects

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Shortage of preschool teachers
  - Weekly meeting with mentors
  - Students are allowed to prepare for teaching in collaboration with mentors
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - Mentor's interest or lack of interest impacts students' learning
  - Working students felt they were causing problems for the preschools by attending their programs or practice
  - Students did not see themselves as part of the partnership
  - Students do what is expected of them

- Good mentoring during the practicum empowers them
- Short practice periods and many assignments could reduce the quality of the practicum
- They felt torn being both students and working at the same time
- Students did not experience collaboration between the university and the practice field during the practicum other than the university informs the practice field
- Students discussed formal mentoring education for those who undertook the mentoring role

### **9.2.2 Preschool-based mentors**

#### Tools/instruments

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Assignments students perform during the practicum
    - Received from either university teacher (UY) or the project manager (UX)
  - The mentoring handbook (the same handbook for students and mentors, each university has its own handbook)
  - Meeting with students weekly
- Interviews (Studies 2, 3, and 4)
  - Emails from the university to the practice field
  - Mentoring dialogue

#### Rules

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Universities plan the practicum
  - Universities contact preschools
  - Preschool principals choose mentors for the students
  - Payment from the universities to the practice field
  - Mentors must have a license to teach
  - Mentors are not paid directly from the university
    - Principals decide how money is distributed
- Interviews (Studies 2, 3, and 4)
  - National curriculum

- Preschool curriculum
- Daily schedule in the preschool

#### Community

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Universities
  - Department of education in each municipality
- Interviews (Studies 2, 3, and 4)
  - University teachers
  - Preschool principals
  - Co-workers
  - Student teachers
  - Children in preschools
  - Parents

#### Division of labor

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Universities plan the practicum
  - The principals choose mentors
  - They mentor one or two students during the practice periods
- Interviews (Studies 2, 3, and 4)
  - Mentoring dialogues
  - Help students carry out their assignments during practice

#### **Expected outcome of the activity**

- Linking theory and practice by implementing and discussing field assignments

#### **Boundary objects**

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Shortage of preschool teachers
  - Weekly meeting with mentors
  - Mentors help student teachers prepare for teaching
- Interviews (Studies 2, 3, and 4)
  - Students' interest during the practicum

- Students' focus on assignments can reduce the interaction between mentors and themselves during the practicum
- Working students are under pressure, and the mentors are worried about them
- Mentors feel that their role is to perform what the university decides is to be done during the practicum
- Express their willingness to start a dialogue and create a shared learning platform between stakeholders
- Mentoring dialogue, if performed correctly, are the key to education
- Mentoring is professionally rewarding
- Short practice periods and many assignments can diminish the quality of the practicum
- Deep learning dialogue is not always possible
- Formal mentoring education for those who undertake the mentoring role

### **9.2.3 University teachers**

#### Tools/instruments

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Emails from preschools asking if they can receive students
  - Emails to the practice field informing about the practicum and assignments (UX)
  - The mentoring handbook (the same handbook for students and mentors, each university has its handbook)
- Interviews (Studies 2 and 4)
  - Assignments prepared for the students
  - Emails from the teacher to the practice field (UY)
  - Preparing the students for the practicum

#### Rules

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Five-year master's study (300 ECTS units)

- Universities plan the practicum
- Universities contact preschools
- Payment from the universities to the practice field
- Teacher union prevented or encouraged preschool teachers not to accept student teachers
- Interviews (Studies 2 and 4)
  - Lack of money prevents collaboration with the practice field

#### Community

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
  - Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture
  - Other universities
  - Department of education in each municipality
- Interviews (Studies 2 and 4)
  - Preschool student teachers
  - Preschool principals
  - Mentors
  - Co-workers

#### Division of labor

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - University plans the practicum
    - Decides the role of the mentor during the practicum
    - Decides what focus students need to have during the practicum
  - University chooses schools (students can request a specific preschool, but the university decides)
- Interviews (Studies 2 and 4)
  - University teachers prepare students with theoretical knowledge for the practicum
  - University teachers/project manager have the final saying by grading the students

#### **Expected outcome of the activity**

- Prepare students for the practicum and help them link theory and practice

### **Boundary objects**

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Lack of time, resources, and money prevent university teachers from working in the practice field during the practicum
  - Few educated preschool teachers and therefore lack of mentors
  - University teachers are not in direct contact with mentors during the practicum
- Interviews (Studies 2 and 4)
  - Students are boundary crossers and the connection to the practice field
  - Design assignments that help students link theory and practice
  - Most students are working students and feel pressure, which affects their learning opportunities
  - They miss being in contact with the practice field
  - They would like more collaboration with the practice field during the practicum
  - Willingness to start a dialogue and create a shared learning platform

### **9.2.4 Preschool principals**

#### Tools/instruments

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Emails from the universities to the preschools asking if they can receive students
  - The mentoring handbook (same handbook for students and mentors, each university has its own handbook)
  - Information from university teachers or project manager about assignments
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - Emails from the university to the practice field

- Assignments students are asked to perform during the practicum
- Interviews with principals' students conducted during the practicum

#### Rules

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Students' contracts with municipalities
  - Payments from the preschools during student teachers' field practice and on-site courses
  - Universities plan the practicum
  - Universities contact preschools
  - Preschool principals choose mentors for the students
  - Payment from the universities to the practice field
  - Teacher union prevented or encouraged preschool teachers not to accept student teachers
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - National curriculum
  - The municipality's school policy
  - Preschool curriculum
  - Daily schedule in the preschool
  - Contracts with student teachers

#### Community

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Universities
  - Department of education in each municipality
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - University teachers
  - Preschool staff
  - Mentors
  - Children in preschools
  - Parents

#### Division of labor

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Universities plan the practicum



- University teachers in University Y prepare assignments for students connected to courses they teach
- Project manager in University X is in contact with the practice field and university teachers
- Principals choose mentors for students
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - Principals connected to UX are in collaboration with the university
  - Principals connected to UY receive information from the university
  - Principals connected to UX experience that their role is important as they are the connection between the two systems
  - Principals connected to UY experience that their role is to serve the university

**Expected outcome of the activity**

- Quality in ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) with preschool student teachers' learning

**Boundary objects**

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Shortage of preschool teachers
  - Weekly meeting with mentors
  - Students are allowed to prepare for teaching in collaboration with mentors
- Focus groups (Studies 2 and 3)
  - Would like more collaboration with the universities
  - Principals' role in the partnership
    - UX see themselves as figurative tunnels
    - UY feels like servants that perform for the university
  - They worry about the mentor's double role
  - Working students
    - Assignments that are designed for students with working experience

- Students are under a lot of pressure
- The practice periods are too short and give little space for students to ask critical questions

### 9.2.5 Policymakers

#### Tools/instruments

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Information from the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities about teacher education
- Interviews (Study 4)
  - Information from the director of education and/or preschool advisor

#### Rules

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Preschool act
  - National curriculum
  - Regulation on the activities of preschools
  - Legal obligations and responsibilities of school boards
  - The municipality's school policy
  - Human resources policy of the municipality
  - Contracts with student teachers
- Interviews (Study 4)
  - Work conditions in preschools
  - Contracts with student teachers

#### Community

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
  - Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
  - Town council
  - Members of their political party
  - Members of other political parties
  - Universities
- Interviews (Study 4)
  - Department of education in each municipality

- Other members of the Board of Education
- Preschool advisors
- Director of education
- Other employees
- Preschool principals
- Preschool student teachers

#### Division of labor

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Ministry of Education, Science and Culture decides, in collaboration with the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, how preschool teacher education is conducted in the collaboration between municipalities and universities
  - Universities decide how the practicum is carried out
- Interviews (Study 4)
  - Ensure good working conditions within the preschools
  - Ensure that preschools are capable (finances or other resources) of receiving student teachers during their practicum
  - Most municipalities ensure that students keep their payments during practicum and on-site courses

#### Expected outcome of the activity

- Quality in the municipality ECEC

#### Boundary objects

- Contextual (Study 1, Chapter 2, and Epilogue)
  - Shortage of preschool teachers
  - Ensure that student teachers working for the municipality attend the course lessons during working hours
- Interviews (Study 4)
  - Feel left out in the collaboration
  - Express their willingness to expand the collaboration with the universities
  - Trust their advisors to inform them about the practice field

- Costly for the municipalities to support students during their education
- Lack of labor while students attend practicum and on-site courses
- Receiving students can affect the learning community within the preschools in an effective way (adding to knowledge and new theory introduced)
- Stressful situations during the practicum (for students and other stakeholders)

### 9.2.6 Summary

Notably, rules and instruments/tools enter systems from the outside, causing the primary contradiction to transform into aggravated contradiction (Engeström, 1999), as seems to be the case in the partnership in preschool teacher education in Iceland. According to Engeström (1999), this can induce progressive and severe disturbance and conflicts, indicating mismatches between the activity system functions and the needs it should meet. From an Icelandic perspective, the findings show that challenging issues and unclear division of labor between the actors prevent joint discussion. The instruments or tools, such as discussions and collaboration, seem to be weak. Artifacts such as assignments created tension, as they were seen as predominant over the actual mentoring conversation. Considering the contradiction between tools, rules, and division of labor, the universities seem to be leading the collaboration; most participants discussed what the universities expected from them and what they needed to do during the practicum with information from the universities. When actors are allowed to be actively involved, they can challenge the old objects of reproduction, favoring new ones. With these findings in mind, I propose two different types of third spaces; one focuses on strengthening the partnership and helping actors locate their role within the partnership. The other focuses on involving actors from the practice field, universities, and municipalities to create a learning community concentrating on student teachers' learning opportunities.

The mentors' role was frequently discussed among stakeholders. A common issue discussed was that preschool-based mentors have a double role during the practicum, working as preschool teachers and being mentors at the same time. Moreover, they are unsure about

their role in the partnership. The absence of university-based mentors during the practicum and their expressed desire to be more involved with the practicum was another issue that surfaced. Therefore, I suggest a third space that pays particular attention to empowering the mentors in both systems by clarifying their role and encouraging collaboration with a focus on preschool student teachers' learning.

### **9.3 Suggested third spaces**

Using the activity system as a backdrop and considering boundary objects that surfaced, different solutions for creating third spaces in preschool teacher education in Iceland can be suggested. In this section, I propose three forms for third spaces that might strengthen Icelandic preschool teacher education, moving from initial objects within each activity to a collective object constructed by actors in collaborative systems (Engeström, 2001), using the contradictions to reconstruct the partnership.

#### **9.3.1 Locating the partnership**

The most apparent challenge was stakeholders' difficulties in locating their role in the partnership. As evident in the boundary objects found from the stakeholders, most of them felt the need to strengthen the partnership. Thus, I would recommend using Smith's (2016) continuum, where stakeholders can define and place the collaboration on the continuum. According to the findings in my project, most partners would be more on the left side of the continuum (separated). Therefore, the actors are advised to perform good groundwork, starting with voicing their expectations, seeking mutual understanding, and agreeing on how to nurture true partnership to create a mutual learning space. A possible means to this end lies within Halvorsen's (2014) first two qualities of partnership: intentionality and unpredictability. This work could help move the partnership toward a more cooperative partnership. It was also clear that students feel pressured and under a lot of stress because of their double role. This is a situation stakeholders with formal authority should consider when deciding how to create a learning environment that focuses on preschool student teachers' learning, as this can be both time-consuming and costly. This was also evident in the findings (boundary objects) that lack of money and resources could prevent collaboration.

After the actors have defined and placed their partnership on the continuum, I suggest using Kemmis et al.'s (2014) recommendations for communicative action, in which actors form ground rules for their

partnership. This involves agreeing on how to continue or interact when developing learning experiences for teacher students. Kemmis et al. (2014) suggested resources that can be used when creating a shared learning community/third space (they used the concept of the public sphere), suggesting that actors discuss their shared concerns and name what they feel needs to be done. Kemmis et al. (2014) also recommend that actors discuss ethical issues that may arise in the partnership, create general principles for the group, and that all actors sign an informed consent. This lays a foundation for further work, helps build mutual trust, and addresses actors' vulnerabilities, allowing participants to strengthen their partnership and move to the right on the continuum (Smith, 2016). This work might help actors become more aware of what the partnership is, what they would like it to be, and what needs to be done to achieve mutual goals.

Dialogue and social connections play a key role in collaboration, and the feeling of belonging—based on actors' ability or inability to shape meaning—affects how they understand their own identity in the partnership (Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2016; Wegner, 1998). In this third space, which allows for dialogue, stakeholders can discuss the partnership in preschool teacher education and what characterizes their partnership, mapping what is strong and what is weak. They can discuss what they expect of the partnership and how they can achieve these visions. By taking part in planning and having the feeling of belonging, actors are more likely to become active participants, and the expansion of learning is more likely to occur. Here, I would suggest a boundary crosser working with the group; a joint position between the municipality and the university is useful in these first steps. Flexibility and vitality (Halvorsen, 2014) are the dominant resources in this phase. Therefore, the actors' expectations toward the partnership need to be voiced to ensure that the project does not stagnate or fall apart. Using Engeström's (2015) activity system and mapping out the Icelandic perspective, the findings show that challenging issues and unclear division of labor between the actors prevent discussion using a shared language. Therefore, actors must build trust and have a shared vision for the partnership (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016). This would make a significant difference in the networking phase presented in True partnership model, chapter 7.

**Subjects:** Preschool principals, university teachers, preschool advisors/local politicians, preschool-based mentors, and boundary crossers.

**Expected outcome of the activity**

Creating a platform for true partnership

**9.3.2 True partnership model**

Another common issue is the separation of stakeholders' experience within the partnership. Still, it became clear that stakeholders wished to strengthen the partnership, focusing on the dialogue between actors during the interviews. Using this knowledge and a common solution that stakeholders expressed, I suggest a formative intervention using the Change Laboratory (CL) system (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013), focusing on preschool student teachers' professional learning.

In a formative CL intervention, the separations between a complete view from outside and partial views from inside, alongside subjective dedication and objective analysis, are overcome by helping practitioners cooperatively analyze and develop the activity's entire system (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). The method calls for boundary crossing between the world of research and practical activity and crossing disciplinary and professional boundaries (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Knowledge creation in a CL intervention begins from the first contact with the participants or the organization. It starts as a dialogue driven by the interaction between the researchers' theoretical concepts and participants' concepts and ideas and the data gathered about the activity. The challenge for the researcher-interventionist is to keep this interaction and dialogue alive throughout the entire process (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

In this third space, the goal is to try out the partnership model with stakeholders in early childhood education. Initially, the collaboration would be between one university, one municipality, and two preschools. The expected benefit for preschool student teachers is increased professionalism and quality in preschool education, which translates directly to working with children.

Literature has found partnership during field practice necessary in creating a good learning environment for student teachers (Simonsen, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). Lillejord and Børte (2016) emphasize that actors need to structure partnerships according to the dynamics between the systems if a partnership is successful.

I suggest using the third phase of the model for true partnership presented in chapter 7. In phase three of the model, the focus is on the learning community, where the essential factors are participation, mutual trust, shared learning, democracy, and belonging. In the findings, actors expressed these issues and would like to experience such a learning community in the future. Using Engeström's (2015) activity theory and considering the contradiction between tools, rules, and division of labor, the universities seem to be leading the collaboration by deciding when and how the practicum is performed and implemented. Therefore, by focusing on a shared learning environment and involving actors, they can challenge the old objects of reproduction and favor new ones. Hence, I suggest focusing on two of Halvorsen's (2014) resources, flexibility, and vitality, as flexibility is an essential aspect of collaboration in partnerships. In this phase, participants need to free themselves of ingrained habits and rituals so new ideas can appear, and innovation, creativity, and engagement can materialize (Halvorsen, 2014; Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2010). Also, dialogue and social connections are significant factors in collaboration, and the feeling of belonging affects how actors understand their own identity in the partnership (Smith, 2016; Zeichner, 2016; Wegner, 1998).

**Subjects:** Student teachers, preschool-based mentors, university teachers, preschool principals, preschool advisors/local politicians, and boundary crossers.

#### **Expected outcome of the activity**

Creating a shared learning platform

#### **9.3.3 Crossing boundaries**

The mentors' role was discussed among stakeholders. It seemed to be a common issue in that preschool-based mentors seemed to be in a double role, unsure about their role in the partnership and the absence of university-based mentors during the practicum, and their expressed desire to be more involved with the practicum. Therefore, I suggest a third space that pays particular attention to strengthening the mentors in both systems, focusing on preschool student teachers' learning. Here, the focus is still on boundary crossing between the two systems,



and I suggest using argumentative interaction patterns by Ben-Harush and Orland-Barak (2019).

In this pattern, there is a balanced power relation between the two types of professionals, and it is also emphasized that they acknowledge the differences between the two cultures. Moreover, the division of labor is equal between the two groups. Such actions involve actors agreeing on how to proceed or interact when developing learning experiences for student teachers (Lemon et al., 2018; Passy et al., 2018). In the findings from Study 3 and the overall mapping of objects, the evidence is that preschool-based mentors play a crucial role in student teachers' learning. Contradiction in the division of labor showed the need to look further into these findings. The reasons mentioned are ethical, financial, professional, and personal. Given these findings and the need to strengthen the professional learning environment of preschool teachers in Iceland (Einarsdóttir et al., 2013), Hennem and Østrem's (2016) definition of what defines a profession helps strengthen the collaboration between actors and preschool-based educators.

As I have discussed earlier, evidence obtained in Iceland (Einarsdóttir et al., 2013) suggests that the preschool teacher profession is weak, as the professionalism is not visible to others who work in preschools. With this information in mind and supported by Hennem and Østrem's (2016) findings that reinforcing the professional rhetoric can effectively highlight preschool teacher expertise, joint seminars might be used as a platform to strengthen preschool teachers. This viewpoint was also evident in the object, roles in the partnership, where findings showed that the university was a dominant actor, as a traditional division of labor and tools were used during field practice. Joint seminars focusing on mutual learning, where all actors have a role in the partnership, could alter this contradiction. As a follow-up to the seminar, partners can discuss whether they would like to create a university-preschool partnership.

**Subjects:** Preschool-based mentors, university teachers, and boundary crossers.

**Expected outcome of the activity**

A professional learning community for mentors in preschool teacher education

## 9.4 Summary

In this dissertation, I asked the following question: How can “the Third Space” become a meaningful learning arena in Icelandic preschool teacher education? In this epilogue, I addressed potential activities that can improve preschool teacher education in Iceland. I proposed transformation using Smith’s (2016) continuum to locate the partnership and identify the qualities in the partnership (Halvorsen, 2014). Moreover, I suggest creating a third space reflecting a non-hierarchical learning platform for preschool and university-based educators, and, finally, a formative CL intervention focusing on preschool student teacher education and the formation of a third space with many actors involved in the education.

In response to comments from the examiners, the epilogue provides an overview of Icelandic preschool teacher education, describing how the findings point at the boundary objects, and finally suggestions for how to implement third spaces in an effort to strengthen Icelandic preschool teacher education and the collaboration between universities and the practice field, thus narrowing the gap between theory and practice in Icelandic teacher education. Other contexts beyond Iceland are likely to face similar challenges. Hopefully, this thesis and the suggestions regarding the creation of third spaces might be useful in the important work of improving preschool teacher education globally. Think globally, act locally has been a guiding perspective when working on my doctoral thesis.

## References

- Akkerman, S. F., & Bakker, A. (2011). Boundary crossing and boundary objects. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(12), 132–169.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311404435>
- Anderson, L. (2011). Embedded, emboldened, and (net)working for change: Support-seeking and teacher agency in urban, high-needs schools. *Harvard Educational Review, 80*(4), 541–573.  
<https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.80.4.f2v8251444581105>
- Arnesson, K., & Albinsson, G. (2017). Mentorship—A pedagogical method for integration of theory and practice in higher education. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 3*(3), 202–217.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2017.1379346>
- Bender, S. S. (2013). Samræður í rýnihópum [Discussions in focus groups]. In S. Halldórsdóttir (Ed.), *Handbók í aðferðafræði rannsókna* (pp. 299–312). Háskólinn á Akureyri.
- Ben-Harush, A., & Orland-Barak, L. (2019). Triadic mentoring in early childhood teacher education: The role of relational agency. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 8*(3), 182–196. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-10-2018-0055>
- Bhabha, H. (1990). The third space. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity, community, culture and difference* (pp. 207–221). Lawrence & Wishart.
- Bjarnadóttir, R. (2015). *Leiðsögn: Lykill að starfsmenntun og skólaþróun* [Mentoring: The key to vocational qualification and school reform]. Háskólaútgáfan.
- Björnsdóttir, A., Jóhannsdóttir, Þ., & Jónsdóttir, H. (2019). *Nemar í leikskólakennaranámi. Spurningakönnun meðal leikskólakennaranema á fyrsta ári í B.Ed.námi skólaárið 2018–2019* [Preschool teacher students. Questionnaire among preschool teacher students in their first year in bachelor education, school year 2018–2019]. Menntavísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2016). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (3rd ed.). Columbia University.

- Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M., & Robson, K. (2001). *Focus groups in social research*. Sage.
- Boge, M., Markhus, G., Moe, R., & Ødegaard, E. E. (2009). *Læring gjennom veiledning: Meningsskapning i grupper* [Learning through mentoring: Creating knowledge in learning communities] (2nd ed.). Fagbokforlaget.
- Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). Conducting an interview. In S. Brinkmann & S. Kvale (Eds.), *Interviews. Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed., pp. 149–166). Sage.  
<https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781529716665>
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Harvard University Press.
- Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Canrinus, E. T., Bergem, O. K., Klette, K., & Hammerness, K. (2017). Coherent teacher education programmes: Taking a student perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 49(3), 313–333.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1124145>
- Chan, C. (2020). I know how it feels: How online mentors help pre-service teachers negotiate practicum tensions in the third space. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 28(2), 189–210.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2020.1749348>
- Clark, M. (2019). Edges and boundaries: Finding community and innovation as an early childhood educator. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(2), 153–162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-018-0904-z>
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. Sage.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. RoutledgeFalmer.
- Daza, V., Gudmundsdottir, G. B., & Lund, A. (2021). Partnerships as third spaces for professional practice in initial teacher education: A scoping

- review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 102, 103338.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103338>
- Dewey, J. (2011). *Democracy and education*. Simon & Brown.
- Edwards, S. (2005). Constructivism does not only happen in the individual: Sociocultural theory and early childhood education. *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(1), 37–47.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0300443042000230311>
- Eik, L. T. (2014). *Ny i profesjonen. En observasjons- og intervjustudie av førskolelæreres videre kvalifisering det første året i yrket* [Doctoral thesis, University of Oslo]. <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-48412>
- Eik, L. T., Steinnes, G. S., & Ødegård, E. (2016). *Barnehagslæreres profesjonslæring* [Preschool teachers' professional learning]. Fagbokforlaget.
- Einarsdóttir, J. (2011). *Training of preschool teachers in Iceland*. School of Education, University of Iceland.
- Einarsdóttir, J. (2012). Leikskólakennaramenntun í mótun [Forming of the preschool teacher education]. *Netla*, 1–9.  
<http://netla.hi.is/greinar/2012/alm/002.pdf>
- Einarsdóttir, J. (2013). Early childhood teacher education in the Nordic countries. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(3), 307–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2013.814321>
- Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080020028747>
- Engeström, Y. (2009). The future of activity theory: A rough draft. In A. Sannino, H. Daniels, & K. D. Gutiérrez (Eds.), *Learning and expanding with activity theory* (pp. 303–328). Cambridge University Press.  
<https://doi.org/DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511809989.020>
- Engeström, Y. (2015). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Engeström, Y. (2016). *Studies of expansive learning: Learning what is not yet there*. Cambridge University Press.

- Engeström, Y., & Sannino, A. (2010). Studies of expansive learning: Foundations, findings and future challenges. *Educational Research Review*, 5(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2009.12.002>
- Fitchett, P. G., King, E. T., Fisher, T., Coffey, H., & Harden, S. (2018). Building program coherence and the (un)intentional clinical experiences for first-semester preservice teachers. *Action in Teacher Education*, 40(3), 319–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2018.1486747>
- Flick, U. (2018). Triangulation in data collection. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection* (pp. 527–544). Sage.
- Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Grudnoff, L., Haigh, M., & Mackisack, V. (2017). Re-envisaging and reinventing school–university practicum partnerships. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(2), 180–193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2016.1201043>
- Guðmundsson, G. (1949). *Barnavinafélagið sumargjöf 25 ára: 1924 – 11. apríl - 1949* [The children’s fund 25 years]. Barnavinafélagið Sumargjöf.
- Gupta, A. (2015). Pedagogy of third space: A multidimensional early childhood curriculum. *Policy Futures in Education*, 13(2), 260–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210315579540>
- Gupta, A. (2020). Preparing teachers in a pedagogy of third space: A postcolonial approach to contextual and sustainable early childhood teacher education. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 34(1), 43–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2019.1692108>
- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms*. Beacon.
- Halvorsen, K. V. (2014). *Partnership in teacher education* [Doctoral thesis, University of Bergen]. <https://bora.uib.no/bora-xmlui/bitstream/handle/1956/8928/dr-thesis-2014-Kirsti-Vindal-Halvorsen.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Háskóli Íslands. (2016). *Menntavísindasvið, Vettvangsnám í kennaradeild: Leikskólakennararmenntun, vettvangsnám*. [School of Education, Field practice in Faculty of Teaching: Preschool Teacher Education, Field practice]. Retrieved August 10, 2016, from [http://vefsetur.hi.is/vettvangsnam/leikskolakennarafr/vettvangsnam\\_0](http://vefsetur.hi.is/vettvangsnam/leikskolakennarafr/vettvangsnam_0)

- Háskóli Íslands. (2019). *Náms- og kennsluskrá 2019–2020* [Course catalogue 2019–2020]. *Leikskólakennarafræði B.Ed.* [Preschool teacher education B.Ed.]. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from [https://ugla.hi.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=nam&chapter=namsleid&id=820099\\_20196&kennsluar=2019](https://ugla.hi.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=nam&chapter=namsleid&id=820099_20196&kennsluar=2019)
- Háskóli Íslands. (2020). *Leikskólakennarafræði: Um námið* [Preschool Teacher Education: About the education]. Retrieved August 19, 2020, from [https://www.hi.is/kennaradeild/um\\_namid](https://www.hi.is/kennaradeild/um_namid)
- Háskólinn á Akureyri. (2016). *Hug- og Félagsvísindasvið, Kennaradeild: Vettvangsnám* [School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Education, Field practice]. Retrieved August 12, 2016, from <http://www.unak.is/hugogfelagsvisindasvid/kennaradeild/vettvangsnam>
- Háskólinn á Akureyri. (2019). *Náms- og kennsluskrá 2019–2020* [Course catalogue 2019–2020]. *Kennsluskrá 2019–2020* [Programs offered 2019–2020]. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from <https://ugla.unak.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=skoli&chapter=content&id=97>.
- Háskólinn á Akureyri. (2020). *Náms- og kennsluskrá 2020–2021: Kennarafræði, B.Ed., 180 einingar: Samsetning náms: Leikskólakjörsvið.* [Course catalogue 2020–2021, Educational Studies, B.Ed., 180 ECST: Programme composition: Preschool]. Retrieved August 19, 2020, from [https://ugla.unak.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=nam&chapter=namsleid&id=640014\\_20206&kennsluar=2020&lina=403](https://ugla.unak.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=nam&chapter=namsleid&id=640014_20206&kennsluar=2020&lina=403)
- Helleve, I., & Ulvik, M. (2019). Tutors seen through the eyes of mentors assumptions for participation in third space in teacher education. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 42*(2), 228–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1570495>
- Hennum, B. A., & Østrem, S. (2016). *Barnehagelæreren som profesjonsutøver* [The preschool teacher as professional agent]. Cappelen Damm.
- Hreiðarsdóttir, A. E., Steingrímsdóttir, M., & Þorsteinsson, T. (2011). *Endurskoðun vettvangsnáms og æfingakennslu við HA: Skýrsla starfshóps* [Re-evaluation of field practice at the University of Akureyri]. Háskólinn á Akureyri.
- Jackson, A., & Burch, J. (2019). New directions for teacher education: Investigating school/university partnership in an increasingly school-

based context. *Professional Development in Education*, 45(1), 138–150.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2018.1449002>

- Jóelsdóttir. (2018). *Aðgerðir gegn brottfalli nemenda úr leikskólakennaranámi: Niðurstöður könnunar á meðal nemenda sem hætt hafa 2014–2015*. Menntavísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.
- Jonassen, D. H., & Rohrer-Murphy, L. (1999). Activity theory as a framework for designing constructivist learning environments. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 47(1), 61–79.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02299477>
- Jónsdóttir, A. H. (2004). "Það þarf að hlúa að sálum ..." Gyða Sigvaldadóttir fyrrverandi leikskólastjóri ["We need to take care of the souls ..."] Gyða Sigvaldadóttir former preschool principal]. In B. Hansen, J. Einarsdóttir, & Ó. H. Jóhannsson (Eds.), *Brautryðjendur í uppeldis- og menntamálum* [Innovators in educational policies and education] (pp. 53–72). Rannsóknarstofnun Kennaraháskóla Íslands.
- Jónsdóttir, A. H. (2015). University–preschool partnership and workplace-based learning: A collaborative “third space” or no space at all? *Early Years*, 35(2), 184–196.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2015.1026248>
- Jónsdóttir, H. (2013). Viðtöl í eigindlegum og megindelegum rannsóknum [Interviews in qualitative- and quantitative research]. In S. Halldórsdóttir (Ed.), *Handbók í aðferðafræði rannsókna* (pp. 137–153). Háskólinn á Akureyri.
- Jónsson, A. I., & Helgadóttir, O. (2010). *Spor í sögu stéttar: Félag leikskólakennara í 60 ár* [Tracing the history of the union: Preschool teachers union 60 years]. Skrudda.
- Jupp, V. (Ed.). (2006). *The SAGE dictionary of social research methods* (1st ed.). Sage.
- Karila, K. (2017). ECEC pedagogy in the Nordic countries—Its roots and current challenges. In K. Karila, E. Johansson, A. M. Puroila, M. Hännikäinen, & L. Lipponen (Eds.), *Pedagogy in ECEC: Nordic challenges and solutions* (pp. 11–15). Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Karlsson Lohmander, M. (2015). Bridging “the gap”—Linking workplace-based and university-based learning in preschool teacher education in Sweden. *Early Years*, 35(2), 168–183.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2015.1025712>



- Keiler, L. S., Diotti, R., Hudon, K., & Ransom, J. C. (2020). The role of feedback in teacher mentoring: How coaches, peers, and students affect teacher change. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 28(2), 126–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2020.1749345>
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research*. Springer.
- Klein, E. J., Taylor, M., Onore, C., Strom, K., & Abrams, L. (2013). Finding a third space in teacher education: Creating an urban teacher residency. *Teaching Education*, 24(1), 27–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2012.711305>
- Klein, E. J., Taylor, M., Onore, C., Strom, K., & Abrams, L. (2016). Exploring inquiry in the third space: Case studies of a year in an urban teacher-residency program. *The New Educator*, 12(3), 243–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1547688X.2016.1187980>
- Korthagen, F. A. J. (2010). How teacher education can make a difference. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 36(4), 407–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2010.513854>
- Kristinsson, S. (2013). Að verðskulda traust: Um siðferðilegan grunn fagmennsku og starf kennara. In R. Sigbórsson, R. Eggertsdóttir, & G. H. Frimannsson (Editors), *Fagmennska í skólustarfi: Skrifað til heiðurs Trausta Þorsteinssyni* (pp. 237–255). Háskólaútgáfan.
- Kristjánsdóttir, Þ. J. (1995). *Fjarnám Fósturskóla Íslands* [Distance learning]. Fósturskóli Íslands.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews*. Sage.
- Lee, R. E. (2018). Breaking down barriers and building bridges: Transformative practices in community- and school-based urban teacher preparation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69(2), 118–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487117751127>
- Lemon, N., Wilson, A., Oxworth, C., Zavros-Orr, A., & Wood, B. (2018). Lines of school-university partnership: Perception, sensation and meshwork reshaping of pre-service teachers' experiences. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(10). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43.n10.5>

- Leontèv, A. N. (1981). The problem of activity in psychology. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 37–71). M.E. Sharpe.
- Lewis, E. (2012). Locating the third space in initial teacher training. *Research in Teacher Education*, 2(2), 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.15123/ucl.85y5y>
- Lillejord, S., & Børte, K. (2016). Partnership in teacher education—A research mapping. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(5), 550–563. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2016.1252911>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Lög um Fósturskóla Íslands, nr. 10/1973. [Law on Pedagogical College of Iceland].
- Lög um menntun og ráðningu kennara og skólastjórnenda við leikskóla, grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla, nr. 87/2008. [Laws on education and appointing teachers and principals in preschools, compulsory schools, and colleges].
- Lög um menntun, hæfni og ráðningu kennara og skólastjórnenda við leikskóla, grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla, nr. 95/2019. [Law on education, competence and appointing teachers and principals in preschools, compulsory schools and secondary schools].
- Lög um um persónuvernd og vinnslu persónuupplýsinga, nr. 90/2018. [Act on data protection and the processing of persona data].
- Martin, S. D., Snow, J. L., & Torrez, C. A. F. (2011). Navigating the terrain of third space: Tensions with/in relationships in school-university partnerships. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62(3), 299–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487110396096>
- Menntamálaráðuneytið. (1995). *Efling uppeldis- og kennaramenntunar á Íslandi: nefndarálit* [Strengthening pedagogic and teacher education in Iceland: Committee report]. Menntamálaráðuneytið.
- Mennta- og menningamálaráðuneytið [Ministry of Education, Science and Culture]. (2014). *Fyrirkomulag um launað starfsnám kennaranema*. <https://www.stjornarradid.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=388b9679-86af-11e9-943f-005056bc530c>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2011). *The Icelandic national curriculum guide for preschools*. Mennta- og menningamálaráðuneytið.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. (2014). *Hvítbók um umbætur í menntun* [White paper on education reform]. Mennta- og menningamálaráðuneytið.
- Moje, E. B., Ciechanowski, K. M., Kramer, K., Ellis, L., Carrillo, R., & Collazo, T. (2004). Working toward third space in content area literacy: An examination of everyday funds of knowledge and discourse. *Reading Research Quarterly, 39*(1), 38–70. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.39.1.4>
- Molla, T., & Nolan, A. (2019). Identifying professional functionings of early childhood educators. *Professional Development in Education, 45*(4), 551–566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2018.1449006>
- Mörk, S. B. (2018). Historical perspective of the third space in Icelandic preschool teacher education. In K. Smith (Ed.), *Norsk og internasjonal lærerutdanningsforskning: Hvor er vi? Hvor vil vi gå? Hva skal vi gjøre nå?* (pp. 91–107). Fagbokforlaget.
- Nguyen, H. T. T. (2020). Learning to teach across the boundary: A cultural historical activity theory perspective on a university-school partnership in Vietnam. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 96*, 103183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103183>
- Nolan, A., & Molla, T. (2018). Teacher professional learning in early childhood education: Insights from a mentoring program. *Early Years, 38*(3), 258–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2016.1259212>
- Nyckel, J. G., Lander, R., & Thång, P. (2020). Fragmented boundary zones between theory and practice in preschool teacher education in Sweden. *Journal of Praxis in Higher Education, 2*(2), 82–105. <https://doi.org/10.47989/kpdc86>
- Passy, R., Georgeson, J., & Gompertz, B. (2018). Building learning partnerships between schools and universities: An example from south-west England. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 44*(5), 539–555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1516346>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Pétursdóttir, S., Garðarsdóttir, B., Einarsdóttir, S., Jónsdóttir, S. E., Stefánsdóttir, S. K., Guðmundsdóttir, S., Gestsdóttir, S. M., Mósesdóttir, P. S., & Björnsdóttir, P. G. (2011). *Að byggja brú: Tillögur samráðshóps*

*um vettvangsnám í Kennaradeild.* [Building a bridge: Consultations groups' recommendation on field practice in teachers' faculty]. Háskóli Íslands, Menntavísndasvið.

Postholm, M. B. (2015). Methodologies in cultural–historical activity theory: The example of school-based development. *Educational Research*, 57(1), 43–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2014.983723>

Preschool Act No. 90/2008.

Quinn, S., Damjanovic, V. J., Branson, S., Caldas, E., & Ledford, E. (2017). The use of pedagogical documentation techniques to create focal points in a school-university partnership in early childhood education: Technologies that create a “Third Space.” *School-University Partnerships*, 10(3), 30–50. [http://napds.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-use-of-Pedagogical-Documentation-Techniques-to-Create-Focal-Points-in-a-School-University-Partnership-in-Early-Childhood-Education\\_Technologies-that-.pdf](http://napds.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-use-of-Pedagogical-Documentation-Techniques-to-Create-Focal-Points-in-a-School-University-Partnership-in-Early-Childhood-Education_Technologies-that-.pdf)

Rapley, T., & Rees, G. (2018). Collecting documents as data. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection* (pp. 378–391). Sage.

*Reglugerð um Fósturskóla Íslands, nr. 137/1979.* [Regulation on Pedagogical College of Iceland].

Røys, H. (2017). Veiledningssamtalen sem verktøy for utvikling av kvalitet i barnehagen. In E. K. Høihilder & H. Lund-Kristensen (Eds.), *Praksis-barnehagen: En arena for læring* (pp. 123–136). Gyldendal Akademisk.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Sanjari, M., Bahramnezhad, F., Fomani, F. K., Shoghi, M., & Cheraghi, M. A. (2014). Ethical challenges of researchers in qualitative studies: The necessity to develop a specific guideline. *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine*, 7, 14–14. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25512833>

Sannino, A., Daniels, D., & Gutiérrez, K. D. (2009). Activity theory between historical engagement and future-making practice. In A. Sannino, D. Daniels, & K. D. Gutiérrez (Eds.), *Learning and expanding with activity theory* (pp. 1–15). Cambridge University Press.

Saugstad, T. (2002). Educational theory and practice in an Aristotelian perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 46(4), 373–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031383022000024561>

- Sewell, A., Cody, T.-L., Weir, K., & Hansen, S. (2018). Innovations at the boundary: An exploratory case study of a New Zealand school-university partnership in initial teacher education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(4), 321–339.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2017.1402294>
- Sigurðardóttir, A. K. (2014). *Þróun kennaramenntunar við Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands: Greinagerð um vinnuferli og mótun kennaranáms frá 2008* [Development of teacher education at the Iceland University of Education: Report about the structure and formation of teachers' education]. Menntavísindasvið Háskóla Íslands.
- Sigurðardóttir, V. (1998). *Fósturskóli Íslands: Afmælisrit í tilefni 50 ára afmælis skólans 1996* [Pedagogical College of Iceland: 50 years jubilee in 1996]. Gott Mál.
- Simonsen, B. (2017). Praxis som læringsarena [Practice as a learning arena]. In E. Høihilder & H. Lund-Kristensen (Eds.), *Praxis-barnehagen: En arena for læring* (pp. 19–26). [The practice preschool: A learning arena]. Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Smith, K. (2015). Mentoring: A profession within a profession. In H. Tillema, G. J. van der Westhuizen, & K. Smith (Eds.), *Mentoring for learning: Climbing the mountain* (pp. 283–298). Sense.
- Smith, K. (2016). Partnership in teacher education—Going beyond the rhetoric, with reference to the Norwegian context. *CEPS Journal*, 6(3), 17–36.
- Smith, K., & Ulvik, M. (2015). An emerging understanding of mentors' knowledge base. In H. Tillema, G. J. van der Westhuizen, & K. Smith (Eds.), *Mentoring for learning: Climbing the mountain* (pp. 299–312). Sense.
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Blackwell.
- Statistic Iceland. (2020). *Pre-primary institution. Personnel in pre-primary institutions by education 1998–2018*.  
[https://px.hagstofa.is/pxis/pxweb/is/Samfelag/Samfelag\\_\\_skolamal\\_\\_1\\_\\_leikskolastig\\_\\_1\\_\\_lsStarfsfolk/SKO01301.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?r\\_xid=35e5021a-e394-4c72-9c31-80ad8094656f](https://px.hagstofa.is/pxis/pxweb/is/Samfelag/Samfelag__skolamal__1__leikskolastig__1__lsStarfsfolk/SKO01301.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?r_xid=35e5021a-e394-4c72-9c31-80ad8094656f)
- Stauffacher, M., Walter, A. I., Lang, D. J., Wiek, A., & Scholz, R. W. (2006). Learning to research environmental problems from a functional socio-

- cultural constructivism perspective: The transdisciplinary case study approach. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 7(3), 252–275. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1108/14676370610677838>
- Steele, A. R. (2017). An alternative collaborative supervision practice between university-based teachers and school-based teachers. *Issues in Educational Research*, 27(3), 582–599. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85026829386&partnerID=40&md5=1888bd2e48be4f0637d0d51849ad6fac>
- Stefna Kennaraháskóla Íslands 2005–2010: Samþykkt á fundi háskólaráðs 21. desember* [Policy of the Teacher University 2005–2010: Approved at faculty meeting, 21 December]. (2004). Kennaraháskóli Íslands.
- Tracy, S. J. (2020). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.
- Tsui, A. B. M., & Law, D. Y. K. (2007). Learning as boundary-crossing in school-university partnership. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(8), 1289–1301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.06.003>
- van Velzen, C., Bezzina, C., & Lorist, P. (2009). Partnerships between schools and teacher education institutes. In A. Swennen & M. van der Klink (Eds.), *Becoming a teacher educator* (pp. 59–73). Springer Netherlands. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8874-2\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8874-2_5)
- Virkkunen, J., & Newnham, D. S. (2013). *The change laboratory: A tool for collaborative development of work*. Sense.
- Wang, X., & Wong, J. L. N. (2017). How do primary school teachers develop knowledge by crossing boundaries in the school–university partnership? A case study in China. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(5), 487–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2016.1261392>
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1981). The concept of activity in Soviet psychology. An introduction. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 3–36). M.E. Sharpe.
- Williams, J., White, S., Forgasz, R., & Grimmet, H. (2018). Stories from the third space: Teacher educators' professional learning in a school/university partnership. In A. Fitzgerald, G. Parr, & J. Williams

(Eds.), *Re-imagining professional experiences in initial teacher education* (pp. 19–36). Springer Singapore.

Wyche, S., Sengers, P., & Grinter, R. E. (2006). Historical analysis: Using the past to design the future. In P. Dourish & A. Friday (Ed.), *UbiComp 2006: Ubiquitous computing*. Berlin, Heidelberg.

Yamagata-Lynch, L. C., & Smaldino, S. (2007). Using activity theory to evaluate and improve K-12 school and university partnerships. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 30*(4), 364–380.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2007.08.003>

Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college- and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(1–2), 89–99.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347671>

## Appendices



## **Appendix A – Focus Groups Interview Framework**

*What are stakeholders' views toward collaboration between preschools and universities and what is most important?*

### **Opening questions: 1 min per person                      8 min**

- Tell me about your education (where you obtained your [preschool teacher] education) and where you have worked.

### **Introduction: 4 min person                      24 min**

- How did you experience your field practice?
- Those who work in university/preschool – experience from the field before and how their experience now.

### **Transition: 5 min per person                      5 min**

- What comes to mind first when you hear the term collaboration?

### **Key questions                      70 min**

- What do you think characterizes collaboration between preschools and universities? 20 min  
(Stakeholders are university teachers, mentors, preschool principals, and preschool student teachers).
- What is your position in the collaboration? 10 min
- What affects the collaboration between universities and preschools? 20 min
  - What prevents collaboration?
  - What promotes (or supports, contributes to) collaboration?
- How would you organize collaboration between stakeholders? 10 min

### **Ending question - all things considered: 2 min per person   16 min**

## Appendix B – Focus Groups Assistants Notes

*Hver eru viðhorf hagsmunadila til samstarfs leikskóla og háskóla í leikskólakennaramenntun á Íslandi?*

Dagsetning \_\_\_\_\_ Kl: \_\_\_\_\_ Hópur \_\_\_\_\_ Fjöldi \_\_\_\_\_

Staður \_\_\_\_\_

Rannsakandi \_\_\_\_\_ Ritari/aðstoð \_\_\_\_\_

**Ranskandi kynnir sig og segir frá rannsókninni**

**Ritari kynnir sig og segir frá sínu hlutverki**

- ◊ Minnir á upplýstusamykki sem allir verða að skrifa undir í lokin
- ◊ Skráir niður það sem er sagt
- ◊ Fylgist með upptökutækjum
- ◊ Fylgist með tímanum
- ◊ Fylgist með samskiptum og samspili hópsins
- ◊ Er vakandi fyrir líkamstjáningu og svipbrigðum
- ◊ Tekur þátt í umræðum, ef eitthvað er óljóst gæti hann óskað eftir nánari upplýsingum
- ◊ Dregur saman í lokin

Ágætt að teikna upp hvernig viðmælendur raðast við borðið. Þegar viðmælandi segir eitthvað sem gripur og ranskandi/ritari skráir niður skrá

Assistant took notes on how participants (viðmælandi) acted (hegðun) the tone of voice (raddblær) in the group.

Opening questions: 1 min á mann Total 8 min Segðu stutt frá þér, menntun (hvar lærðir þú leikskólakennarann) og starfi—Förum hringinn

Viðmælandi

Hegðun/tónn (raddblær)

A

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

## **Appendix C - Interview Framework (Individuals)**

The overall question: *What are stakeholders' perceptions of the practical place in the early childhood teacher education, and how do they see their role in the partnership?*

### **Questions to be asked in the interview**

- To start, I would like to know a little about you. Can you tell me how long you have been working here (been in politics)?
  - What is your education? What are your experiences of preschools?
- Tell me about your experience regarding the partnership/collaboration of preschool teacher education.
- How do you experience the place of the practical in the education of preschool teachers?
- What do you think characterizes the collaboration between municipalities/preschools and universities?
- How do you see your role in the partnership or the practical place of the education?
- What affects the collaboration between universities and municipalities/preschools?
  - What prevents collaboration?
  - What promotes (or supports, contributes to) collaboration?
- How would you organize collaboration between stakeholders?
- What effect do you think the new internship in early childhood teacher education will have on the education and/or the partnership?
- How do you foresee the future of preschool teacher education and the place of practical education?
- Is there anything else you would like to add or ask me?

## Appendix D – Letter to Local Municipalities

Hafnarfjörður, október 2016

Kynning á rannsókn á samstarfi leikskóla og háskóla í vettvangsnámi í leikskólakennaranámi

Svava Björg Mörk heiti ég og er doktorsnemandi við HÍ – ég er að vinna að rannsókn um samstarf á milli háskóla og leikskóla. Ég mun taka rýnihópa viðtöl við nokkra hagsmunaaðila leikskólakennaranámsins, nánar til tekið, leikskólastjórnendur, leikskólakennara, leikskólakennaranemendur og háskólakennara. Í rannsókninni mun ég skoða hvernig samstarfið á milli hagsmunaaðila er, hvað gengur vel og hvað má bæta. Rætt verður um reynslu og viðhorf viðkomandi aðila og upplifun þeirra á samstarfi á milli allra hagsmunaaðila. Áætlað er að viðtalið taki um það bil 90 mín.

Spurningin sem ég leitast við að fá svör við er:

*Hver eru viðhorf hagsmunaaðila til samstarfs leikskóla og háskóla í leikskólakennaramenntun á Íslandi?*

Ef það vakna upp spurningar er velkomið að hafa samband við mig í síma 664-5855 eða senda mér tölvupóst á netfang mitt svavabm@hi.is

Leiðbeinendur mínir eru

### ***Prófessor Kari Smith***

Academic Leader of NAFOL (Norwegian Research School in Teacher Education)

Program for Teacher Education (PLU)

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

### ***Dr. Arna H. Jónsdóttir***

Lektor/ assistant professor

Formaður námsbrautar í Leikskólakennarafræði/

Department Chair in Early Childhood Education

Rannsóknin verður tilkynnt til Persónuverndar.

Fyllsta öryggis verður gætt í meðferð gagna.

Með kærri kveðju,

Svava Björg Mörk

Kt: 280671-4879

## Appendix E – Informed Consent Document

Hafnarfjörður, nóvember 2016

Upplýst samþykki vegna þátttöku í rannsókn á samstarfi leikskóla og háskóla um vettvangsnám í leikskólakennaranámi

Kæri/a \_\_\_\_\_

Ég heiti Svava Björg Mörk og ég er doktorsnemandi við Háskóla Íslands. Rannsóknarefni mitt er hvernig byggja megi upp samstarfið á milli leikskóla og háskóla í leikskólakennaramenntun. Ég mun taka viðtöl við nokkra rýnihópa þar sem ég mun kanna viðhorf hagsmunaaðila leikskólakennaramenntunar, sem eru leikskólakennararnemar, leikskólakennarar sem taka að sér leiðsögn nemenda, háskólakennarar og leikskólastjórar, til samstarfs á milli leikskóla og háskóla í vettvangsnámi.

Fullum trúnaði er heitið og verður gögnum eytt í lokin.

Meginspurningin sem ég leitast við að fá svar við er:

*Hver eru viðhorf hagsmunaaðila til samstarfs leikskóla og háskóla í leikskólakennaramenntun á Íslandi?*

Rannsóknin verður tilkynnt til Persónuverndar.

Þar sem verkefnið mitt byggist á því að afla mér upplýsinga um samstarf á milli leikskóla og háskóla er reynsla þín og þátttaka ómetanleg. Fyllsta öryggis verður gætt við meðferð gagna. Gögnunum verður eytt að lokinni úrvinnslu auk þess sem er ég bundin þagnareid um þær upplýsingar sem koma fram. Mikilvægt er að hafa í huga að þú getur hætt þátttöku í rannsókninni hvenær sem þú vilt og án þess að geta til um ástæður.

Leiðbeinendur mínir eru

Professor Kari Smith

Academic Leader of NAFOL (Norwegian Research School in Teacher Education)

Program for Teacher Education (PLU)

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

Dr. Arna H. Jónsdóttir  
Lektor/ assistant professor  
Formaður námsbrautar í Leikskólakennarafræði/  
Department Chair in Early Childhood Education

Ef það vakna upp spurningar hjá þér er þér velkomið að hafa samband við mig í síma 664-5855 eða senda mér tölvupóst á netfang mitt svavabm@hi.is

Með kærri kveðju,

Svava Björg Mörk

Kt: 280671-4879



## Appendix F – Informed Consent Document

Reykjavík, apríl 2019

Upplýst samþykki vegna þátttöku í rannsókn á samstarfi vettvangs og háskóla um vettvangsnám í leikskólakennaranámi

Kæri/a \_\_\_\_\_

Ég heiti Svava Björg Mörk og ég er doktorsnemandi við Háskóla Íslands. Rannsóknarefni mitt er hvernig byggja megi upp samstarfið á milli vettvangs og háskóla í leikskólakennaramenntun. Rannsóknin beinist að nokkrum hagsmunaaðilum leikskólakennaranámsins, fulltrúum pólitísku meirihluta í landspólitík, háskólakennurum með völd og/eða ábyrgð og leikskólakennurum með framhaldsmenntun í starfstengdri leiðsögn.

Fullum trúnaði er heitið og verður gögnum eytt í lok verkefnisins.

Meginspurningin sem ég leitast við að fá svör við er:

- ***Hver er upplifun hagsmunaaðila af vettvangsnámi í leikskólakennaramenntun, hvaða væntingar hafa þeir og hvernig sjá þeir sitt hlutverk í samstarfinu?***

Þar sem verkefnið byggist á því að afla upplýsinga um samstarf á milli hagsmunaaðila og háskóla er reynsla þín og þátttaka ómetanleg. Fyllsta öryggis verður gætt við meðferð gagna. Gögnunum verður eytt í lok verkefnisins auk þess sem er ég bundin þagnareid um þær upplýsingar sem koma fram. Mikilvægt er að hafa í huga að þú getur hætt þátttöku í rannsókninni hvenær sem þú vilt og án þess að geta til um ástæður.

Leiðbeinendur mínir eru

**Professor Kari Smith**

*Academic Leader of NAFOL (Norwegian Research School in Teacher Education)*

*Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)*

**Dr. Arna H. Jónsdóttir**

*Dósent í leikskólkennarafræðum og menntastjórnun/Associate Professor in  
Early Childhood Education and Educational Leadership*

*Menntavísindasvið HÍ/ School of Education, University of Iceland*

Fyllsta öryggis verður gætt í meðferð gagna og þátttakendur fylla út upplýst samþykki.

Ef það vakna upp spurningar hjá þér er þér velkomið að hafa samband við mig í síma 774-5588 eða senda mér tölvupóst á netfang mitt svavabm@hi.is

Með kærri kveðju,

---

Svava Björg Mörk

Kt: 280671-4879

## Appendix G

### Visual summarizing of development of preschool teacher education in Iceland

<i>Period</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Theoretical Field practice</i>		<i>%</i>	<i>Connection with the field</i>	<i>Theory and practice</i>
<b><i>The beginning 1946–1967</i></b>	Uppeldisskóli Sumargjafar College	1/2	1/2	50 %	School and preschool in the same building Sumargjöfs preschools	Sigurðardóttir met the students twice a week during field practice Progressive movement
<b><i>New opportunities in education 1968–1979</i></b>	Fóstruskóli Íslands College	1/2 2/3	1/2 1/3	50 % 33 %	The state took over the education. Connection with Sumargjöfs preschools	Learning by doing – Dewey and Gesell were the inspiration
<b><i>Reaching farther with distance learning 1991–1995</i></b>	Fósturskóli Íslands Distant learning	2/3	1/3	33 %	Rural areas – more opportunities for working people in rural areas to study	Theme work
<b><i>Preschool teacher education at a university level 1990–1995</i></b>	University of Akureyri University of Iceland	4/5	1/5	20 %	Contracts with several preschools/preschool teachers	Critical and reflective approach. Introduction to different theory in educational practice
<b><i>Master's degree and changing times 2000 –2015</i></b>	University of Iceland and University of Akureyri	4/5	1/5	>20 %	Cooperation preschools	(Mattsson et al., 2011) Critical and reflective approach in education. Introduction to different theory in educational practice
<b><i>Paid internship 2019 -</i></b>	University of Iceland and University of Akureyri Current situation			>14 %	Paid internship and cooperation preschools	Critical and reflective approach in education. Introduction to different theory in educational practice