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Boundary-spanning in school–university partnerships and its related definitions

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Abstract

Purpose – The overarching purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of "boundary-spanning" roles, terms and structures in order to move closer to a foundational definition of boundary-spanning in school–university partnerships (SUPs) and Professional Development Schools (PDSs).

Design/methodology/approach – This conceptual context study analyzed 27 chapters from an edited book on boundary-spanning in SUPs and PDSs in an attempt to synthesize the roles, terms, structures and benefits of boundary-spanning in practice.

Findings – Our study offered an emerging definition of the "boundary-spanner," an analysis of seven terms common to boundary-spanning and an exploration of three necessary boundary-spanning structures. Finally, we identified common challenges and benefits to boundary-spanning within SUPs and PDSs.

Research limitations/implications – Although the data for this analysis were drawn only from one manuscript, the chapters represent a comprehensive collection of cases of boundary-spanning in practice, and the analysis of these chapters revealed persistent variance in definitions and conceptualizations indicating that even within one collection, the practice remains ill-defined.

Practical implications – While attempting to formally delineate the difference between "common" partnerships and "true" boundary-spanning could become an act of pedantry, we believe our analysis of these 27 cases might move the field of teacher education toward a more common understanding of the concept and its related practice. And the result might be that we all become better boundary-spanners within our own contexts and communities.

Originality/value – Decades of theoretical frameworks and foundational literature have laid the groundwork for boundary-spanning in theory, but the majority of the chapters collected in the volume that served as our data set were empirical. By analyzing these chapters as examples of boundary-spanning in practice, we began to identify themes of boundary-spanning in practice – beyond theory – across multiple educational contexts even outside of traditional PDSs and SUPs.

Keywords Boundary-spanning, Educational partnership, Professional development, Professional development school, Professional learning, School-university partnership, Teacher education

Paper type Research paper

"Boundary-spanning" in teacher education has taken on myriad meanings. At its core, it is a phrase that describes instances where university-based or school-based individuals engage in meaningful teacher preparation activities across contexts and beyond the silos in which their primary education institutions operate. These intentionally structured partnerships merge research and practice to ideally develop preservice teachers and improve educational outcomes for PK-12 students in ways that are mutually beneficial for all members.

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The recently released book, *Boundary-Spanning in School-University Partnerships* (Zenkov *et al.*, 2025), is a collection of 27 chapters primarily from university-based educators detailing their experiences and understandings of boundary-spanning within school–university partnerships (SUPs) and professional development schools (PDS). The three authors of this article served as editors of the book, and while assembling the volume and via a post-hoc analysis of the chapters, we were taken aback by the number, range, and diversity of the ways in which teacher educators defined this now foundational teacher education term and engaged in boundary-spanning endeavors.

Within the book, these "boundary-spanning" (often also termed "hybrid" or "third space") efforts–set in the USA, Canada, and European countries–occurred in a variety of contexts, including in research–practice partnerships (RPP), via teacher development structures, in community-based enrichment projects, and via teacher residency models. While all of the efforts described in the collected chapters were designed to enhance pre- and in-service teachers' pedagogies and PK-12 students' learning, our initial analyses suggested that this diversity was so great that it was difficult to determine a unified notion of "boundary-spanning." That the concepts of boundary-spanning were so varied within one collection indicates a larger concern in the field of teacher education: boundary-spanning practitioners are operating under myriad definitions and understandings of the terms, concepts, and structures. We hypothesize clarification around this concept is needed if such structures are to become more widespread, able to be systematically applied and examined, and become more beneficial to the field of teacher education. Given the frequency with which such a notion is being employed in teacher education endeavors, it seems vital that our field determine its meaning (or meanings).

While "boundary-spanning" is increasingly employed as influencing the very nature of teacher education, it is still a relatively new concept in the field of teacher education, and this edited collection represents perhaps the most comprehensive consideration of this notion and its related roles, structures and activities in practice. These chapters revealed that "boundary-spanning" is a unique and often ill-defined construct in SUPs and PDSs (and perhaps also in the broader world of education and other fields). We believe that allowing for a diversity of understandings of a concept is reasonable and even productive for developing such novel notions, but we posit that the application of the term "boundary-spanning" has become so central to teacher education endeavors that our field now needs a common understanding of this concept and its related elements and structures.

The overarching purpose of this article is to provide an analysis of "boundary-spanning" roles, terms, and structures in order to move closer to a foundational definition of boundary-spanning in SUPs and PDSs. Via a content analysis of the chapters of this edited book as data, we identify commonalities and discrepancies among scholars who are involved in boundary-spanning activities in SUPs and PDSs. To contextualize these analyses and findings, we begin with an examination of the research literature related to boundary-spanning in teacher preparation settings with a particular consideration of such practices and structures employed in SUPs and PDSs. We follow with accounts of our own experiences as boundary-spanning teacher educators in order to both illustrate the diversity of boundary-spanning activities and also contribute additional narratives of boundary-spanning. We then present our interpretation of the specific roles, structures, and terms related to boundary-spanning. We conclude with implications and future considerations for the field of teacher education.

Based on our *a priori* knowledge of the variation in the definitions, descriptions, organization, and roles of boundary-spanning efforts that appear in these chapters and the need for a common understanding of what constitutes boundary-spanning, this paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. What terms were most commonly used to name and describe boundary-spanning roles, structures, and activities in PDSs/SUPs?

RQ2. What were the main structures needed to facilitate successful boundary-spanning in PDSs/SUPs?

Theoretical foundations of boundary-spanning

Decades of theoretical frameworks and foundational literature have laid the groundwork for boundary-spanning in theory, but the majority of the chapters collected in the volume that served as our data set were empirical. By analyzing these chapters as data sets, we began to identify themes of boundary-spanning in practice – beyond theory – across multiple educational contexts, even outside of traditional PDSs and SUPs. We position our findings alongside the foundational theories and resulting research around boundary-spanning within teacher education.

The theoretical foundations of boundary-spanning originated within the context of PDSs. Born in the 1980s from the work of the Holmes Group (1995) and the National Network for Education Renewal, a "PDS" refers to a mutualistic partnership between universities and PK-12 schools, with four key elements: (1) a focus on teacher education; (2) an emphasis on PK-12 student learning; (3) collaborative research endeavors; and (4) the simultaneous renewal of all constituents (primarily PK-12 teachers and university-based teacher educators) (NAPDS, 2021).

The NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel in 2010 emphasized the necessity of clinical experiences in teacher education (NCATE, 2010). Effective clinical experiences often rely on specific structures within PDSs and SUPs. As such, the field has produced a variety of subsequent reports on clinical partnerships and their related principles, one of which is the concept of boundary-spanning (AACTE, 2018; Zenkov *et al.*, 2018; Burns & Baker, 2016; NAPDS, 2021; Wegemer & Renick, 2021). Boundary-spanning has repeatedly been proven to enhance clinical experience structures (Fisher & Many, 2014; Fisher-Ari *et al.*, 2018; Zeichner, 2010) and enable a range of teacher education constituents to be more responsive to diverse students' educational needs (Buxton *et al.*, 2005; Zeichner *et al.*, 2015; Zenkov & Pytash, 2018). However, researchers have continued to note the lack of clarity surrounding boundary-spanning and its related roles and responsibilities (Zenkov *et al.*, 2018; Burns & Baker, 2016; Wegemer & Renick, 2021).

The Second Edition of the "Nine Essentials" from the National Association for Professional Development Schools (an organization founded to advocate for this partnership structure) defined not only the characteristics and foundational elements of PDSs and other forms of SUPs but also the concept of "boundary-spanning," which enabled individuals and structures to "transcend institutional settings" (NAPDS, 2021, p. 4). The Nine Essentials expanded upon this in the full "Essential" summary:

> PDSs–figuratively the spaces between schools and universities–are conceived of as places of discovery and experimentation, governed by ideas and ideals and not bound by the traditions of any one institution. They are designed to renew a culture of teaching, learning, leading, and schooling. PDS participants span boundaries between university and P–12 settings; thus, their work is situated in the "third space," which distinguishes it from work occurring solely in school or only in university organizations. PDS participants assume a variety of boundary-spanning roles, defined by each respective PDS. These boundary-spanning roles incorporate necessary functions and are integral to the operations of each PDS. (p. 16)

The NAPDS leaders who authored the Second Edition of the Nine Essentials and other scholars have since elaborated on the definition of boundary-spanning with more examples related to this notion detailed soon after the Essentials were published (Cosenza *et al.*, 2022; Parker *et al.*, 2018; Zenkov *et al.*, 2024).

Collectively, the research literature on boundary-spanning has revealed a range of the theoretical bases of, the related challenges to, and the benefits of this notion and its implementation

(Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Daza *et al.*, 2021; Stevens, 1999; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Stevens' (1999) foundational work on the role of boundary-spanners in SUPs analyzed a variety of case studies to explore how boundary-spanners could forge ideal partnerships and overcome common barriers to effective collaboration amongst multiple participants (Stevens, 1999). Weerts and Sandmann (2010) defined boundary-spanning as purposeful activities in teacher education that expanded on traditional practices of teacher preparation and research.

Similarly, Akkerman and Bakker's (2011) conceptual framework of "boundary crossing" and "boundary objects" attempted to both define boundary-spanning and identify common roles and structures necessary for successful boundary-spanning, describing this construct as navigating different roles and expectations across sociocultural and institutional contexts. Their theoretical base also includes calls for university-based educators to include principals and teacher leaders as bridges for collaboration within and outside of schools, naming all of these contributing voices as equal boundary brokers in the exchange (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). A related theoretical framework is "communities of practice" – a group of people engaged in collective learning and working together to solve a common problem by interacting regularly (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

All of the chapter authors in our edited book labeled their own work as boundary-spanning, and yet we identified some contradictions between these authors' definitions, definitions of this concept in other scholarship and foundational literature, and our own personal notions of boundary-spanning. For example, consider the "boundary-spanner" which has been defined as any individual who goes beyond their established professional role and ingratiates themselves within the culture and context of a different institution; in this third space between professional roles, all participants share their expertise to achieve a mutualistic goal, thus spanning the boundaries of their individual institutions (Goodlad, 1990; NAPDS, 2021). However, as our findings reveal below, both "boundary-spanner" and "third space" employed a range of denotations and functions across the chapters that served as our data.

As we explore in the remainder of this article, it is reasonable to contend that the explanation above and other descriptions of boundary-spanning are problematically vague. Of course, as we noted in the introduction to this manuscript, such ambiguity can be useful and even intentional, leaving room for practitioners and scholars to interpret boundary-spanning activities in ways that best fit the needs of their own contexts. However, one consequence of this lack of clarity is that we are less likely to be able to communicate with each other, our constituents, or policymakers about this structure and its importance. Additionally, the more we study boundary-spanning in practice, beyond just theory, the more we can modify our own boundary-spanning endeavors to have the greatest impact on our partners and PK-12 students. As our own stories illuminate in the next section, boundary-spanning in practice can take on a variety of shapes, boundary-spanners can have a range of motivations, and these activities can have a variety of benefits.

Our personal stories of boundary-spanning

As editors of this book and the authors of this article, we represent a set of boundary-spanning initiatives in our own right. Lin is a veteran high school teacher and doctoral student who was only recently introduced to boundary-spanning. Kristien and Drew are university-based teacher educators who – in addition to receiving "Boundary-Spanner" Awards from the National Association for School-University Partnerships (NASUP) – helped co-author the Second Edition of the NASUP (formerly National Association for Professional Development Schools) Nine Essentials (NAPDS, 2021), a document that defines the characteristics and foundational elements of PDSs and other forms of SUPs. As such, we have each influenced and been influenced by each other's understandings of both the theories and practices of boundary-spanning.

Given the novel and often ambiguous nature of boundary-spanning as a concept, we provide the following first-person anecdotal accounts of our own entry points into boundary-

spanning, which we believe will help the reader understand this concept and further illustrate the varied definitions of this practice. While not all teacher education scholarship needs to be rooted in nor explicitly related to scholars' or research subjects' stories, a consideration of boundary-spanning begs for the inclusion of such examples and narratives. If we are to sufficiently document the nature of boundary-spanning capacities and structures in SUPs and PDSs – and to assess their value and perhaps make a case for their recognition in our field – then we need a rich base of "stories from the field" on which to rely as we continue to grow our understanding of boundary-spanning.

Experiences of Lin Rudder

When Kristien (Author 2) asked to visit my high school in spring 2021, I was excited. We were in an odd post-COVID-hybrid situation, and I was dying for a way to get my students engaged after a disrupted year of virtual-hybrid instruction. I shot an email to my principal and told him some teacher candidates were coming to work with the seniors. The principal replied asking for a meeting. I remember sitting in his office trying to describe the activity, but I was struggling to explain why a professor and his grad students wanted to come to the school and work with one of my classes. My principal was suspicious, but he finally agreed.

The day Kristien and his teacher candidates arrived, they led my class through a photovoice activity that had the students running across campus, taking pictures, and conceptualizing their beliefs about what "good" teaching is. At the end of the activity, we invited teachers and administrators to see their work in a presentation. My principal loved it. In the fall, when Kristien asked to come back, my principal said yes immediately.

Since 2021, Kristien has visited my school multiple times and worked with a variety of students and teachers. However, his first visit illustrated how difficult it can be to explain boundary-spanning work to others. My administration, who collectively had decades of experience, were confused about the concept of a workshop led by teacher candidates. In their experiences, university personnel only visited schools to recruit future students. However, once my school's leadership was shown proof of concept – that such visits could be beneficial to everyone involved – they became enthusiastic. The advantages of boundary-spanning were immediately apparent.

As a teacher, these activities were also crucial for my own growth. In the fall of 2023, I invited Kristien to come back and help my research class with a lesson. Typically I took a backseat for these workshops, but for this visit, I planned the lesson due to the unique structure of the class. A week before their visit, I emailed Kristien the lesson plan without much thought. To my shock, he gave me feedback on it. Despite knowing Kristien for nearly a decade, and trusting him immensely as an educator, I unfairly viewed him as "not a teacher" and therefore, not allowed to give me feedback. However, as I read through the comments, I realized he was right. His insights made the lesson better. I made the changes, and the next time he had ideas on classroom practices, I was eager to hear it. At the end of our first lesson together, he asked the teacher candidates to give me their feedback too. I readily made changes for the next lesson based on their insights, too.

We all know and decades of educational research have repeatedly revealed that teaching can be isolating. It can also be professionally stifling: You can become so enamored with your own goals and teaching persona–and defensive from multiple parties questioning your methods and philosophies seemingly all the time, especially in this particularly politicized era–that you can put up walls around your teaching practices without even realizing it. While I loved having these folks from the university come in, I had a blind spot about my own barriers, inflexibility, and stubbornness regarding my practice.

I think about sitting in my principal's office a few years ago, trying to explain this concept of boundary-spanning to him before I had even heard the phrase. I think about not recognizing until years later what a great opportunity it was for me. The power of language is as a mechanism for trust-building and persuasion, and without the right words, it can be more

difficult to convince others of our beliefs. I believe it is crucial for both the field of PK-12 education and the field of teacher education to find the words to convince others of the importance of boundary-spanning because, in my experience, you have to participate in it to understand what it is and why it's necessary. And I believe, when it's done well, the outcomes benefit not just the students, but the boundary-spanners too.

Experiences of Kristien Zenkov

I had the privilege of completing my PhD in Curriculum and Instruction (teacher education) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, beginning my doctoral journey there in 1993. I'd been a teacher in multiple contexts by that point–at an alternative high school in Chicago, at a Catholic school on the city's west side and at a literacy and GED (General Educational Development) test center while an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame. In retrospect, it might be reasonable to suggest that my experience with "boundary-spanning" began during these years, as I was often serving in multiple roles (some formal, some informal) in multiple institutions.

I could say that my classroom teaching career ended in 2000 at a middle school outside Seattle, when I was able to finish my dissertation (a study of arts-based and democratic teaching practices in my own classroom) and obtain my first academic position, as a university-based teacher educator. I *could* say that my classroom teaching career ended then. Except it *didn't*. As I write this description and reflection, I'm aware that I was co-teaching a project-based lesson with 10th graders this past summer, and that I'll be co-teaching multiple mini-units with adolescents and their teachers during the new fall semester, via my version of school-university partnerships.

When I began that doctoral work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I was immediately uncomfortable with one key element of that experience: the embodiment of the "Ivory Tower" reality of academia that meant my beloved mentors paid almost no attention to the daily, lived realities of teachers and young people. As a result, my path into the professoriate was far from direct. Unsure if I wanted to leave the classroom, and troubled by that school/university divide, I went back and forth between my PhD program and classroom teaching three times. It was only when I discovered a faculty position that allowed me to work with a PDS program that I thought I might have found a way to both keep my feet on the ground and my head in the clouds, to have some semblance of professional homes at both the university and the schools.

Fast forward twenty-plus years into my academic career, and I now believe boundary-spanning in teacher education is a choice that individuals make, rather than a role or a structure that becomes part of an individual's formal position. I also believe boundary-spanning is as much an ethic as it is a set of tasks that are part of a role or capacity: it's about resistance to silos and about hope for enacting the highest ideals in teacher education – and, by extension – teaching. Forging those SUP and PDS relationships allows me to operate as a boundary-spanner – ideally to everyone's benefit. Boundary-spanners engage in organic, evolving, and responsive activities, in both schools and universities, and they are reflexively and honestly aware of their positions – in universities or schools. Finally – and perhaps most importantly – boundary-spanners are ready to interrupt problems and practices that are not serving pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, or children and youth well. But until we have at least a common language around boundary-spanning practices it may be impossible to know what we are aiming to interrupt and what we believe should be renewed and reinforced.

Experiences of Drew Polly

Boundary-spanning has given me the privilege and opportunity to work with some of the most caring and hard-working teachers and administrators in the state of North Carolina. As a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, we spent time in schools facilitating professional learning for teachers and supporting them when they taught mathematics to elementary school

children. This work in elementary schools was part of the university's culture and had become normalized in my mind as something that faculty did and should do. When I graduated and took my current job at UNC Charlotte in 2006, I sought opportunities in local school districts to form partnerships with district leaders, school administrators and teachers. Aligned with the idea of mutually beneficial partnerships, I approached these initial interactions seeking to listen and learn about what school leaders and teachers wanted and needed based on their experiences and data. This approach let me build genuine professional relationships and eventually friendships focused on supporting teaching and learning in different contexts.

Each school was different. With one district the work involved only a focus on serving as a 10,000-feet-above sea level thought partner through systematic planning and implementation of professional learning for teachers and mathematics coaches about the use of student-centered curricula in their 90-some elementary schools (LeHew & Polly, 2013; Polly *et al.*, 2016). In another district, a partnership started with working on technology integration efforts at the district level (Polly *et al.*, 2011), while also simultaneously working closely with one school through observations, support during Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and co-teaching lessons with a few teachers ongoing for multiple years (e.g. Polly, 2017). While there were some district mathematics efforts at times, that work evolved into the district hiring a full-time district-level mathematics leader which I still will collaborate with on topics and efforts related to her needs and interests. Lastly, in two other school districts, boundary-spanning activities have focused on collaborating with grade-level-specific PLC meetings to support teachers' planning of lessons, analysis of data, and in some cases time in classrooms.

As these experiences highlight, boundary-spanning can encompass a variety of contexts, activities, partnerships, and goals. It is unsurprising, then, that a lack of clarity persists around boundary-spanning terminology and scholarship. In order for the field to continue to move forward and for boundary-spanning activities to be valued and proliferated, particularly as more evidence emerges of their benefits for educational partners and PK-12 students, there is a need for clearer delineations of frequently used words and overlapping phrases related to boundary-spanning. In this way, our stories help us learn and share ideas and solutions amongst one another as scholars to improve these collaborative structures for all.

Methods

As noted in this article's introduction, our edited book (Zenkov *et al.*, 2025), included 27 chapters exploring boundary-spanning activities in SUPs. We analyzed these chapters as data in order to examine the research questions:

RQ1. What terms were most commonly used to name and describe boundary-spanning roles, structures and activities in PDSs/SUPs?

RQ2. What were the main structures needed to facilitate successful boundary-spanning in PDSs/SUPs?

We employed a conceptual content analysis methodology (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorf, 2019) to look for commonly occurring themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) across the 27 chapters. Content analysis is an empirical method appropriate for larger text sets, like book chapters, that recognizes similarities and contrasts between the communication of ideas and language; this form of content analysis calls for purposive sampling that can address the research questions (Kippendorf, 2019). For this study, each of the 27 chapters in our edited book was treated as its own distinct data set as each chapter was bounded by its own context and unique boundary-spanning project. We acknowledge potential limitations with only including chapters from this one edited volume in this analysis, but based on the existing literature described above, this study was conducted in order to provide an initial, thematic narrative of published peer-reviewed reports of authentic boundary-spanning

activities in practice–a type of scholarship that does not yet exist. The iterative rounds of peer-review and revision involved in the selection and drafting of the chapters for the volume supported the validity of our choice of these chapters as data. We also employed multiple rounds of member checking to ensure that our analyses were consistent with authors' understandings of boundary-spanning: as part of our research and writing processes for this article, authors were given multiple opportunities to clarify or revise their written accounts of boundary-spanning and usage of terms.

Collection and analysis of data

To collect these data, the editors sent a call for manuscripts through the networks and social media accounts of professional organizations well-known for boundary-spanning teacher education including the National Association for School-University Partnerships (formerly NAPDS) and the Association of Teacher Education (ATE). We conducted two to four rounds of review on the original 30 chapters collected for the book, with two of three editors reading and providing feedback to authors. All authors were asked to define and highlight boundary-spanning in their work – and to reference recent and foundational research literature to support these definitions. For reasons to which we were not privy – but that we anticipate were related to our insistence that all references to boundary-spanning be rooted in previously published scholarly reports–three authors elected to withdraw their manuscripts upon receiving this feedback. These manuscripts were not included in the analysis completed for this article.

For the study on which we report in this article, we used a content analysis methodology to examine the concepts and definitions related to boundary-spanning across each of the 27 chapters (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as depicted in Table 1. Based on the research questions, the analysis focused on how authors defined boundary-spanning roles, responsibilities and structures. We also recorded key terms related to boundary-spanning structures, roles, and activities across all chapters, identifying differences and commonalities across our data set.

While we describe our findings in detail in the next section of this manuscript, we first provide an example of these analysis steps to assist the reader in understanding our procedures. For example, after the editors all read the chapters, "boundary-spanner" was identified as a necessary and contested role within boundary-spanning. Seven other terms were selected based on their noted prevalence or as being a common structure in boundary-spanning based on the research literature both in this volume and in the scholarly reports we considered for this article's literature review. In the spreadsheet, we established three columns: definitions,

Table 1. Coding and analyzing data based on a summative content analysis protocol

Phase	Description relevant to this study
(1) Identifying Concepts	Based on research literature of key terms, several conceptual codes were established (ex. SUP, PDS, boundary-spanner). In the editing process, all three editors tracked words that were commonly used
(2) Coding the Data	Each chapter was initially coded by two editors and organized in a spreadsheet noting frequency and usage. With initial data collected, the chapters were re-analyzed to promote reliability. Each chapter was reviewed a second time by all editors and coded appropriately
(3) Latent Content Analysis	Data were examined and interpreted using an open coding process focused on aspects of the research questions, including definitions, structures, roles and challenges/benefits. by all editors. Editors discussed commonalities and differences in concept usage
(4) Interpreting Data	The coded data were then organized by themes in order to identify commonalities and differences across the 27 chapters by all editors. Findings are presented thematically below

Source(s): Table created by authors

roles/structures, and benefits/challenges. Next, we each reread each chapter and coded the data on boundary-spanners within those three columns. When all data sets were coded, we completed a second round of coding. Coding each chapter twice and engaging in extended conversations about our understanding of codes and themes promoted analytical reliability and the trustworthiness of our findings.

Finally, we examined the commonalities and differences within the spreadsheet. We met as a team to analyze the trends and select chapters that employed shared definitions for each term as well as chapters that employed conflicting definitions. To help assess structures of successful boundary-spanning (Research Question 2), we utilized the columns of "benefits" and "challenges" across terms to synthesize common challenges and benefits to boundary-spanning in various contexts. In our findings, we answer both research questions by reporting first on the varied definitions of terms and then on three prevalent structures of boundary-spanning found in our analysis.

Findings

Via our data analysis, we identified several themes aligned to our research questions. For research question one (terms related to boundary-spanning), we analyzed how authors defined the role of the boundary-spanner in their practice as well as seven other common terms related to boundary-spanning activities (third space, SUP, PDS, RPPs, community partners, collaboration, and equity/social justice). We analyzed how different chapter authors defined and utilized these terms in their practice, sometimes in contradiction to other chapter authors. For research question two (structures needed for boundary-spanning), via analyses, we identified what we now believe are the three most essential practices of effective boundary-spanning partnerships which include structuring dialogic relationships, setting mutualistic goals, and establishing formal time and space for meetings. Full reference information from cited chapters can be found in Appendix A.

Research question one: common roles and terms in boundary-spanning practices

The analysis of data on common roles and terms indicated that some terms were commonly used in multiple chapters and whose definitions were central to the boundary-spanning activities described by the chapter authors. Like boundary-spanning itself, these terms often remain ill-defined, as the authors employed these concepts in varied ways. While in the interests of space, we do not offer here a comprehensive summary of all terms, below we highlight this variance by illustrating examples from the chapters first of the role of "boundary-spanner" and then of the terms third space, SUP, PDS, RPP, community partners, collaboration, and equity/social justice.

The boundary-spanner. We begin with an analysis of the term "boundary-spanner" because it is a role that must exist in all boundary–spanning partnerships. While some chapters suggested that the boundary-spanner role is one that only a university-based educator could adopt, others referred to all participants in a partnership as potential boundary-spanners, including PK-12 students. Through our synthesis, most chapters defined boundary-spanners as any individuals who chose to step beyond their official roles or titles to become functional partners with the other members of their respective collective. In Chapter 11, Hall and Almeida (2025) described, "Boundary-spanners are the human resources, the caring people from both PK-12 schools and universities, who together help to erase or diminish the boundaries of each domain" (p. 177).

As suggested by numerous chapter authors, in a seamless boundary-spanning context, roles would be fluid and assumed in an ongoing exchange where the location of expertise shifted frequently. For example, in a traditional hierarchical "partnership," school-based educators might be expected to glean new methods and ideas from university-based educators. But in a collaborative structure that is supportive of boundary-spanning capacities, not only classroom

teachers but also teacher candidates and even PK-12 students might be provided the space to share their voices, ideas, or life experiences, in an effort to shape the knowledge being produced. Given their outsider status in a new context, boundary-spanners often are able to remain uniquely focused on outcomes that might serve students (both PK-12 and university), without defaulting to existing traditions.

Third space. Next, we move to "third space" because it is linked closely to the definition of the boundary-spanner (Goodlad, 1990; NAPDS, 2021). Seven of the chapters employed the term "third space." In Chapter 8, Pace *et al.* (2025) explained third space as a hybrid operational space where teacher educators participating in SUPs often find themselves. Citing the foundational work of Bhabha (1994), Chapter 8 depicted third spaces as a metaphorical destination and the product of boundary-spanning efforts: "Third spaces emerge when typical boundaries are bridged and competing discourses are breached" (Pace *et al.*, 2025, p. 119). Similarly, Hall and Almeida (2025) also defined third space by citing relevant literature: "In teacher education, third space has often come to mean a hybrid space which crosses the academic and practitioner boundaries, giving rise to new possibilities and undermining accepted wisdom" (Lewis, 2012, p. 32 as cited in Hall & Almeida, 2025).

Mayhall (2025) synthesized these ideas in Chapter 13, with a particular emphasis on third space in teacher preparation programs. Mayhall described "first space" educator preparation programs as college-based instruction that can lead teacher candidates to neglect theory and research; "second space" teacher preparation programs loosely merge theory into practice but require teacher candidates to connect their coursework to their field experiences independently. And third space teacher educator programs are hybrid in nature, existing between formal and informal learning environments where theory and practice are interwoven together. Additionally, in Chapter 3, de los Santos and Scoggin (2025) described their RPP as a third space:

> As partners coming from different organizations to engage in shared work, we created a third space that was neither wholly research–nor practice–focused but a hybrid research-practice in which we could bring parts of ourselves to contribute to the work and yet extend our own understanding of what it meant to engage meaningfully in this work. (p. 44)

Based on the data in these chapters, the majority of authors cohered around the idea of third space as a moment or a goal – a product of boundary-spanning where theory and practice were merged and authentic, where organic collaboration was made possible. Olan *et al.* (2025) added nuance to this definition, describing third space as "an ongoing process constantly being negotiated. . .Teacher education is about creating third spaces where spontaneous lived experiences and scientific pedagogical content knowledge intersect for genuine learning to occur" (Olan *et al.*, 2025, p. 408). This understanding of third space suggests it is not a spontaneous event, but, rather, one that is intentionally manifested by teacher educators.

Yet some authors in the collection detailed entirely different understandings of this foundational term and concept. For instance, Trigo *et al.* (2025) in Chapter 7 defined third space as a physical location that provides the structure and opportunity for collaborative boundary-spanning work rather than a philosophical construct or moment. In this deployment of the term (most closely related to Olan *et al.*'s description in Chapter 24), teacher educators could develop third space with relative ease; it was merely about finding time and a venue within which to engage with one another (Olan *et al.*, 2025; Trigo *et al.*, 2025). Meanwhile, in Chapter 9, Marsh (2025) described third space as an occasion when teacher candidates began to reflect on how their fieldwork might affect their eventual classroom teaching practices. In this definition, "third space" was conceived of as a solo endeavor that was the result of boundary-spanning activity rather than an ongoing recursive process that engaged all participants.

School–university partnerships (SUPs). Another commonality between chapters was the use of structures where boundary-spanning occurs, including SUPs, PDSs, and RPPs. We begin with SUPs as it is the broader term, often encompassing PDSs and RPPs. Although seven

chapters utilized the term "SUP" or "school-university partnership," only four authors explicitly defined it. These chapters concurred that SUPs were partnerships between universities and PK-12 schools that linked research and theory with practical application. All seven chapters utilizing SUP wrestled with the relational trust building between various constituents that must occur in order to sustain these partnerships, particularly long-term. Hall and Almeida (2025) wrote in Chapter 11, "[T]he best school-university partnerships involve building networks of people who care deeply about developing the craft of teaching to facilitate deepened student learning and working towards shared goals" (p. 177). Several of the chapters emphasized the efforts of boundary-spanners in forging and maintaining these partnerships. In Chapter 22, Wall and Leckie (2025) acknowledged the difficulties in spanning boundaries to form effective SUPs: "Instead of ignoring or disregarding the structures, processes, and policies of each organization, we took time to listen and learn" (p. 374).

Although many authors in the chapters did not use or define this term, those that did generally agreed both about what an SUP is and the role boundary-spanners play in maintaining effective SUPs. Additionally, although SUPs are often associated with teacher education and clinical work, we recognized that the chapters employing this term were operating in a variety of contexts, including boundary-spanning to support teachers, boundary-spanning in teacher education, boundary-spanning in teacher residencies, and boundary-spanning in community partnerships.

Professional development schools (PDSs). Even fewer authors utilized the term "PDS" or "professional development school" (only three), and none of the chapter authors offered a definition of the term. Instead, the authors only described PDS in relation to boundary-spanning: "boundary-spanners can be found in Professional Development Schools" (Hall & Almeida, 2025, p. 179). Likewise, Ross (2025) in Chapter 21 briefly mentioned PDS as an interplay between theory and practice made possible by engaging in boundary-spanning roles. Finally, in Chapter 8, Pace *et al.* (2025) characterized PDS as partnerships that occurred when university experts collaborated and supported teacher practitioners, again defining PDS in relation to the role of the boundary-spanner.

Research–practice partnerships (RPPs). "Research-practice partnerships" or "RPPs" certainly exist outside of SUPs and as distinct from PDSs and not all RPPs include boundary-spanning roles or structures. However, five of the chapters detailed RPPs that the authors characterized as examples of boundary-spanning. Two of the authors described RPPs as connecting theory and practice – a notion that is not dissimilar to other authors' concept of PDS. Almost all of the authors described two crucial structures of successful RPPs: trust-building and mutualistic goals.

In Chapter 1, Chen and Lin (2025) described the sometimes antagonistic view school-based individuals can have of university researchers initiating RPPs as their goal may be to "extract data" rather than to offer practical solutions to real problems (p. 6). They articulated how important it is for university-based teacher educators to build trust and set mutualistic goals that benefit all parties and demonstrate their commitment to the RPP long-term. In Chapter 4, Gervais Sodani and Irvine Belson (2025) echoed this, emphasizing that long-term boundary-spanning within RPPs required deep relational work, but the results could be a transformation in both knowledge and practice, especially as a variety of perspectives were considered in order to ultimately identify a common goal.

Community partners. The last three common terms are not specific to boundary-spanning, but they were prevalent in the chapters in our edited volume. Our analysis of the term "community partners" encapsulated boundary-spanning participants who were not based in a university or PK-12 school. Five chapters included a community partner such as community centers as sites of boundary-spanning and professional organizations such as teacher unions. Like the other elements of boundary-spanning, forging strong relationships and setting mutualistic goals with participants were key in all chapters that included references to "community partners." In Chapter 17, Kaiser and Wegemeyer (2025) wrote, "Boundary-Spanners can cultivate a shared culture in stakeholder partnerships by being attentive to the

routines and norms across contexts and racial groups, building consensus, and managing tensions" (p. 284). When collaborating with community partners, four of the five chapters also acknowledged the importance of finding regular time and space to meet with one another since so many differing schedules and roles were in play. Intentional, frequent meetings that supported all of the boundary-spanners made it easier to maintain relationships and ensure attention to common goals throughout the process.

Collaboration. All of the chapter authors discussed "collaboration" in some form, but seven chapters specifically described their processes of fostering collaboration within their programs. The three themes noted above that related to successful RPPs and community partners were also highlighted repeatedly in these chapters when qualifying collaboration: strong relationships, mutualistic goals and intentional time and space to meet. Cornér *et al.* (2025) in Chapter 16 emphasized that each participant brought their own knowledge and expertise, so effective collaboration is needed to draw on those strengths and make each member feel like an equal contributor to a common goal. One way to ensure this mutualistic commitment, as described by de los Santos and Scoggin (2025) in Chapter 3, was to share data between one another in a way that felt beneficial to all. In this way, collaboration was highly contextual based on each group and project. In the same chapter, de los Santos and Scoggin (2025) also encouraged university and district administrators to support collaboration in practical ways through funding or flexible scheduling that allowed constituents more time to meet.

Equity and/or social justice. Finally, we identified 10 chapters that used "equity"/"social justice" (or a synonym such as "inclusion") in reference to their boundary-spanning activities. However, several of these chapters left the term undefined or did not thoroughly explain how their boundary-spanning addressed equity or fostered social justice. In Chapter 16, Cornér *et al.* (2025) used a Finnish context to describe language instruction for preservice teachers to better address multilingualism in Finnish schools, and they explained how boundary-spanning connected the theories of equity and social justice with practical applications for their preservice teachers engaging in clinical work:

> The pre-service teachers are already emerging boundary-spanners as they have the capacity to bring theory, new research and practices of social justice acquired through formal activities when studying at the university into the schools, first during their practice periods and then as certified teachers. During their two extensive practice periods in the partner schools and supported by teacher supervisors, the pre-service teachers develop an understanding of the connection between social justice theory and practice. (Cornér *et al.*, 2025, p. 263)

Similarly, many of the chapter authors referred to boundary-spanning as a way to bridge theory and practice in order to improve equity in schools and community programs.

In addition, several of the chapter authors noted that because boundary-spanning brought multiple parties together, it encouraged the consideration of a broader range of perspectives. For example in Chapter 20, Krebs and Scheib (2025) detailed how an equity framework improved outcomes for their teacher residency program in an effort to attract and support more diverse teacher candidates. In this instance, the authors noted that the equity framework was not the boundary-spanning activity but rather it established a scaffold for effective boundary-spanning between teacher residents, PK-12 teachers and university educators by establishing norms and standards for equitable collaboration and relationship building.

Research question 2: three consistent structures of successful boundary-spanning

To further understand the nature of boundary-spanning as employed in these 27 chapters, we also analyzed these data through a consideration of the primary structures that facilitated such roles and were prevalent in our analysis of key terms. Three such structures appeared most consistently across the analysis of key terms: dialogic relationships, mutual goals, and formal meetings. In addition, we identified authors' rationales for each of these structures and the challenges to implementing these structures that they most consistently encountered.

Dialogic relationships. The chapter authors repeatedly highlighted the fact that boundary-spanning roles and structures relied on healthy, productive personal and professional relationships, which were rooted in that ambiguous quality of "trust." A number of authors characterized these relationships as "dialogic" in nature. These relationships were enacted in too many ways to count or synthesize, but they included boundary-spanners at times engaging in formal meetings across their dual professional homes and at other times leveraging community partners to support a partnership's aims.

It is important to note in these authors' illustrations of boundary-spanning roles that most often university-based educators initiated and facilitated that foundational trust-building. As just one of many examples of this pattern, Kline and Grove (2025) in Chapter 12 detailed how the university-based educator in partnerships that involved boundary-spanning capacities was most often the individual at the center of these relationships and the human link between multiple institutions. We speculated that it is likely the case that university-based educators most often played boundary-spanning roles – more so than school-based personnel – because of their more flexible schedules.

Mutualistic goals. Another element that authors consistently cited as enabling boundary-spanning was the identification of a common goal or a desire for all constituents in a partnership to see an initiative thrive. For example in Chapter 1, Chen and Lin (2025) described their work with secondary teachers who also became co-researchers in their RPP. Initially, the teachers' goal was to create media literacy lessons to serve their students, and the university-based researchers hoped to create a research site within the school. Both goals were met, and as the partnership continued, the teachers began to see themselves as co-researchers in this partnership. This shifted the teachers' goals to focus not only on standard objectives for their positions – developing lessons for their students – but also on a new, expanded endgame of participating in the co-creation of a body of knowledge that might serve the field of education. Multiple chapters described the necessity of establishing a mutual goal that all participants worked toward alongside flexibility and patience during goal-setting. Notably, some of the chapters described projects that were funded under grant programs – such as the case of Gervais Sodani and Irvine Belson (2025) who received funding to implement literacy programs in PK-12 schools. In these instances, the overall goal was more firmly established, but the boundary-spanners still allowed all participants to equally drive goal attainment.

Time and space. The most commonly identified and practical structure supporting boundary-spanning activities was time and space to meet. Across the chapters, authors shared that when boundary-spanners were asked to cross institutions and dissolve hierarchies, the responsibilities of their original roles did not usually disappear. Educators engaging in boundary-spanning capacities typically encountered lengthy and often complicated lists of professional obligations, both in their university and PK-12 school homes. In Chapter 21, Ross (2025) noted that,

> [b]y definition, boundary-spanning roles are challenging as they require individuals to serve multiple institutions and supervisors simultaneously. To ease this burden on the residents, the university faculty and school administrators need to be in close communication and align program requirements with employment requirements. (p. 355)

Negotiating time to meet with partners in their secondary professional home – the one to which they were *choosing* rather than *required* to work – was key to their success as boundary-spanners, and particularly for them to engage in that amorphous dialogic relationship-building. While some of the chapters (such as Trigo *et al.*, 2025 and Matsumoto *et al.*, 2025) described separate buildings or space dedicated to these collaborative activities, most boundary-spanning occurred in borrowed classrooms or offices, in eked-out hours or minutes. And while about a quarter of the chapters described community funding or grants that helped compensate boundary-spanners for the additional time they were typically volunteering to invest, most often these tasks went unpaid.

A definition for boundary-spanning: discussion

Our findings reveal an emerging definition of the role of boundary-spanner as any individual who chooses to step beyond their official roles or titles to become functional partners within a third space; in such partnerships, official roles and hierarchies are blurred and dissolved in favor of genuine, equitable collaboration. Despite the fact that some chapter authors only considered the university-based educator to be the boundary-spanner, we contend that all participants in these teacher education ventures might serve as boundary-spanners, even PK-12 students. This more inclusive definition is well aligned with foundational definitions of this role (Goodlad, 1990; NAPDS, 2021).

The seven terms/concepts we identified in the chapters included three terms specific to particular teacher education contexts (SUPs, PDSs and RPPs); three broad terms that were used prevalently by the authors (community partners, collaboration and equity/social justice) but were more generally applicable to teacher education ventures both inside and outside of SUPs, PDSs and RPPs; and one term that we would argue is the most critical to boundary-spanning (third space).

Structures in teacher education: SUPs, PDSs, and RPPs

Although seven chapters used the term SUP, only four formally defined it. Only three chapters used the term PDS, and none of them defined it. All five authors who used the term RPP formally defined it. Regardless of the formal definition, there was very little disagreement on the usage and understanding of these terms between chapter authors. In fact, none of the three authors describing PDSs offered a definition of this structure; this reluctance to, resistance to, or lack of awareness of the importance of providing clear definitions of foundational concepts appears to be a common phenomenon in the field of teacher education.

Broad terms: community partners, collaboration and social justice/equity

Like the structures in teacher education, chapter authors largely agreed on the definition of community partners to describe boundary-spanning partners who were not based in PK-12 schools. Meanwhile, every author who contributed to the book described collaboration in some form, but only seven chapters defined and formally described how to foster collaboration in boundary-spanning partnerships and most of those were related to intentional relationship-building with community partners. These seven chapters offered detailed descriptions of the benefits and challenges of collaboration – namely, the need to develop relationships, set mutualistic goals and find time and space for formal meetings. We suggest one implication of this analysis is that boundary-spanning teams that formally plan collaboration – rather than take it for granted as a byproduct of boundary-spanning–are more likely to consider the contextually specific benefits and challenges of their practice, thus strengthening the outcomes within their partnerships.

Ten of the chapters described some form of equity, social justice or a related term. However, the majority of the chapters left this term undefined or used it as an adjective with little connection to how boundary-spanning promoted equity and/or social justice in their work. While some of the authors proposed that boundary-spanning promoted equity by bridging the theory-practice divide in clinical work or bringing together multiple, diverse perspectives to address problems, we conclude that the specific impact of boundary-spanning on promoting equity in education needs further study.

Contested theory: third space

Finally, "third space" remains a term and concept that is largely contested; this is highly problematic, given the extent to which our definition of "boundary-spanner" relies on this term. As authors of this article, we believe that third space is the most important term in boundary-spanning as the place where barriers dissolve and non-hierarchical collaboration

flourishes. However, the theories of boundary-spanning have long been misconstrued and somewhat unsustainable in practice.

For example, boundary-spanning scholars have explored the ways third space is rooted in anticolonial ideology and can promote social justice (Beck, 2024; Bhabha, 1994) but has been problematically whitewashed in teacher education, devoid of its anticolonial roots (Beck, 2024). Scholars have also noted how practitioners consistently attempting to bridge the third space between roles can face burnout and find the practice unsustainable (Daza *et al.*, 2021; Sawyer *et al.*, 2016). As more teacher educators engage in boundary-spanning, we can move the field forward by studying and measuring these terms in practice, including consideration of third space as that site of resistance and social justice. More measurable examples of boundary-spanning would allow the field to gauge which interpretations and enactments of these concepts are most beneficial for boundary–spanning partners, PK-12 students, and its potential for dismantling power structures and hierarchies.

Achieving the benefits and mitigating the challenges of boundary-spanning

Although our study analyzed the language of boundary-spanning, in our exploration of research question two (the main structures needed to facilitate successful boundary-spanning), we naturally collected data on the noted benefits and challenges across the chapters. We believe these descriptions are useful for other boundary-spanners who are either experienced in the practice or hoping to create boundary-spanning projects for their own partners. Our hope is that this article helps guide other boundary-spanners first by acknowledging the three necessary practices for successful boundary-spanning (dialogic relationships, mutualistic goals, and formal time for meeting) and also by making practitioners aware of common challenges other boundary-spanners have faced.

By definition, boundary-spanning requires an individual to engage in work beyond their formal professional role, and some of this work is of that nebulous nature, including contending with sometimes reluctant school-based partners to build the trust needed to function in unorthodox capacities or communicating with supervisors about the need for boundary-spanning activities. As Ross (2025) detailed in Chapter 21, constituents' personalities, administrators who were unfamiliar with the work of teacher education, insufficient and shifting funding, and mass pandemics could all derail perfectly functional partnerships or programs, often without warning.

This unpredictability can cause teacher education program and school curriculum priorities to shift and – as our (the authors') experiences shared earlier make plainly evident – justifying boundary-spanning to those who have never experienced it directly is difficult even in a stable environment. Educators in almost every context and at almost every level are already overworked and underpaid, so adding on new initiatives or projects that require so much nuance may feel like a nonstarter. However, in spite of these obstacles, our analysis found an exhaustive set of benefits of boundary-spanning. Boundary-spanning makes all participants – and the field of teacher education itself–better.

For example in Chapter 24, Olan *et al.* (2025) highlighted how worthwhile it was to bring a group of diverse people together to try and solve problems: "The greater the heterogeneity, the more productive the solutions become" (p. 401). Additionally in Chapter 5, Khurana and Scanlan (2025) said boundary-spanning in RPPs made it easier to view problems and solutions holistically in ways that were more inclusive for a variety of partners, including PK-12 students. Sixteen of the 27 chapters argued that boundary-spanning helped prepare and grow preservice teachers, and many of those chapters also discussed how the intentional structuring of boundary-spanning partnerships allowed for more opportunities for authentic feedback and reflection. For example, in Chapter 13, Mayhall (2025) described how their SUP intentionally structured time for preservice teachers to receive feedback from multiple mentors and reflect on their own growth as teachers. Marsh (2025) echoed the sentiment, writing, "The potential was the affordance of a 'third space' where the beginning teachers could explore and discuss

their early experiences of teaching" (p. 151) in their description of coursework that paired with boundary-spanning clinical practice.

These and numerous other authors argued that the ideas generated by collaborations that included boundary-spanning roles and structures were more innovative than traditional partnerships that did not involve such capacities because the problems addressed were considered from multiple angles and by individuals with "outsider" perspectives. This phenomenon is perhaps best exemplified by Chapter 26 from Beverly and Boggs (2025), they articulately and effectively argued that the ultimate goal of boundary-spanning is improved outcomes for students.

Moving forward: future of boundary-spanning in practice

The challenges and benefits of boundary-spanning have been well-documented by other scholars (Buxton *et al.*, 2005; Cosenza *et al.*, 2022; Fisher & Many, 2014; Fisher-Ari *et al.*, 2018; Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner *et al.*, 2015; Zenkov & Pytash, 2022), and our synthesis expands this work by identifying common challenges and benefits of recent boundary-spanning efforts across 27 distinct contexts. To provide illustrative context to our examination of boundary-spanning, early in this article we offered narratives detailing the ways boundary-spanning has shaped – or been central to – our professional careers, and how such experiences have positively impacted our teaching and teacher education philosophies, personas and practices. We recognize that the findings shared in this article represent a plethora of ideas and structures that may conflict with readers' (or even our own) notions about and experiences with boundary-spanning. As we have highlighted above, what one university-based or school-based teacher educator might consider to be evidence of a boundary-spanning structure, another individual may instead see merely evidence of a functional partnership.

Some teacher education practitioners include "non-negotiables" as core to their boundary-spanning practices, while others struggle to differentiate traditional teacher education structures from "true" boundary-spanning. While attempting to formally delineate the difference between "common" partnerships and "true" boundary-spanning could become an act of pedantry, we believe our analysis of these 27 chapters might move the field of teacher education toward a more common understanding of the concept and its related practice – an exercise that seems vital given the increasing importance of this concept to the very nature of teacher education endeavors. We call on researchers to continue to engage in boundary-spanning in reflexive ways, sharing their interpretation of these structures as well as challenges and benefits in the hope that we all become better boundary-spanners within our own contexts and communities.

Conclusion

In this article, we conducted a content analysis across the 27 chapters included in our edited book, *Boundary-Spanning in School-University Partnerships* (Zenkov *et al.*, 2025). We engaged in this scholarly exercise because the concept of "boundary-spanning" – the focus of this volume – is increasingly deployed as central to the roles, structures, and even existence of teacher education. While we identified seven terms that were commonly associated with boundary-spanning, some of their definitions remain varied and contested amongst practitioners. We acknowledge that our definition of "boundary-spanner" – an individual who chooses to step beyond their official roles or titles to become functional partners within a third space – problematically relies on the term "third space," a concept that was diversely understood and utilized across the chapters. As a result of this lack of agreement, the explicit practice of "boundary-spanning" itself remains fluid. While the foundational elements we have identified might serve as the basis for more of a shared notion and implementation of boundary-spanning in teacher education, PDS and SUP contexts, we wonder if the teacher education field is not yet at a stage where a unified interpretation of boundary-spanning can be determined.

Coherence around the lexicon of boundary-spanning would improve communication with one another, our partners and even policymakers about this practice and its benefits. However, after crafting the volume of chapters that served as our data set and after completing the thorough analyses on which we report in this article, our primary hypothesis is that it might be the case that this term – like so many terms, concepts and practices in teacher education – is one that should not yet be identified by just one explanation, framework or example. In fact, based on the data of these chapters, these roles and structures vary greatly because boundary-spanners are so committed to context-specific, adaptive and responsive practices. Our coherence around the practice of boundary-spanning will grow as we continue to consider and share empirical examples of boundary-spanning, illustrating and revising how these terms, structures, and concepts serve education in practical ways. Thus, it appears that our scholarly endeavor is necessarily incomplete – one to which our field might collectively return, spanning our institutional and role boundaries to share our efforts and discuss our ideas.

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Supplementary material
The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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