

FERA 2018 Graduate Student Poster Award**Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice:
An Autoethnography**

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Significance of the Research

This research addresses a gap between research-based and theoretical knowledge gained during methods courses taken at the university and the application of those skills in the field for teacher candidates. This continuing disparity has been identified by numerous research groups including the National Association of Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) and the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE). My aim as a researcher was to work collaboratively to facilitate connections for teacher candidates in their science methods coursework and field experiences. This autoethnography stories my experience.

Theoretical Framework

School–university partnerships are a topic of continued concern among educators. Based on the ideas of Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, and Doone (2006), Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994), and Teitel (1998), I recognize the need for partnerships not only between the university and the school setting for pre-service teacher (PST) learning, but among academic instructors and field supervisors. My aim was to examine this connection and how it could benefit PSTs.

My research is framed as an autoethnography, based on the work of Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010). This type of qualitative investigation encourages self-examination and connection of experiences to others, while describing and systematically analyzing personal experience in order to understand cultural involvement. I expressed this through journaling and peer discussion infused with continued reflection.

Procedures of Methods and Analysis

The idea began as an informal collaboration facilitated at a professional development day during pre-planning at our university. Several hours were set aside for academic instructors to meet with field supervisors to make a connection with the aim of creating unity for the good of our PSTs. Taking this further, the science methods instructor, Melanie, for the group of students I supervised approached me about working closely together throughout the semester to support the teacher candidates as they learned to teach science at the elementary school level. We agreed on this being an area in need of attention. The collaboration included attending my school site seminars, as well as me attending her science methods class with students. While Melanie was present in my seminar course, she was able to gain insight into the teacher candidates' field experiences and find ways to support them during her course. My attendance in her science methods

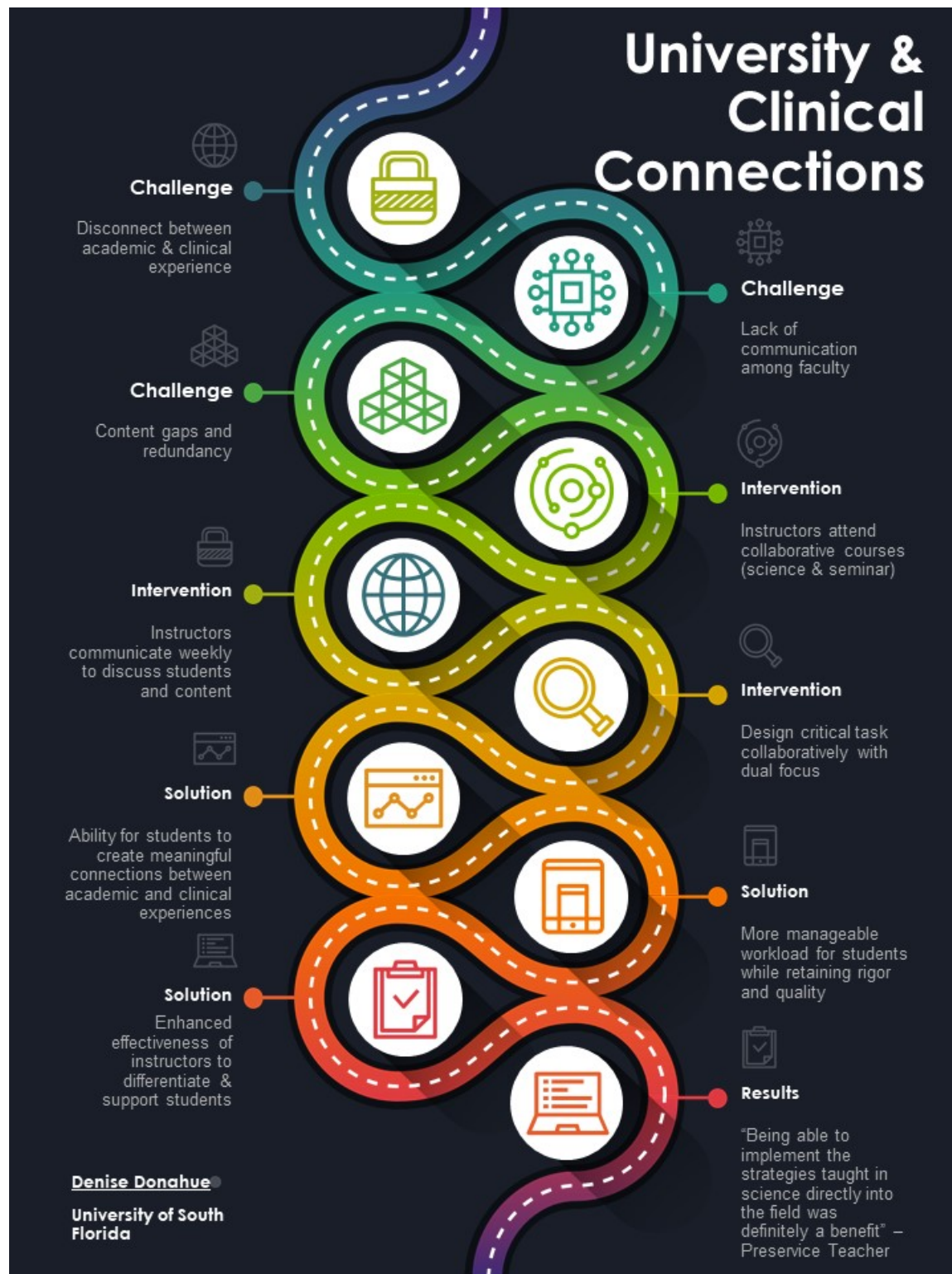


Figure 1. FERA 2018 Graduate Student Poster Award winner

course allowed me to understand the research-based practices they were engaging with so I could help them identify opportunities to utilize those practices during their internship. Additionally, we met outside of class time, maintained journals of our experiences, and collaborated to create a substantial bridge for students to cross between their experiences in the school and experiences at the university. I share my story of our process to inform other instructors and supervisors.

Findings

My story shows that teacher candidates greatly benefit from this type of professional collaboration between Field Supervisor and University Instructor. Specific gains included:

- increase in communication between students and teacher and teacher to teacher;
- more manageable workload for students while retaining rigor and quality;
- enhanced trust and rapport among stakeholders;
- increased effectiveness of seminars;
- ability to differentiate and support students;
- quicker response to students of concern; and
- enhanced professional support.

Although the time commitment was substantial, there can be gradients of allocation with great reward. Pre-service teachers noted the connection and indicated it was advantageous to their professional growth and ability to create connections between course work and field work.

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