CALL TO ACTION

Inclusive and Equitable Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs: Recruiting and Retaining Teacher Candidates with Disabilities

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Inclusive early childhood education teacher preparation programs are tasked with preparing teacher candidates to work with young children with and without disabilities. Yet, many teacher preparation programs continue to function in a medical model of disability, where teacher educators teach candidates to "fix" or "cure" young disabled children. Working from a medical model of disability positions young disabled children as problematic and ostracizes disabled teacher candidates as they see themselves in the very children spoken of by their teacher educators. Instead, practices can be implemented to build on the unique strengths and assets disabled teacher candidates bring to the early childhood field. This call to action has been co-authored by disabled teachers and candidates to highlight the practices teacher educators can instill in their programs with the goal of recruiting and retaining disabled teacher candidates.

Keywords: disability, early childhood, special education, teacher candidates, teacher preparation

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive early childhood education (IECE) teacher preparation programs equip teacher candidates with the skills and knowledge necessary to serve as both early childhood general and

special education teachers, and as both direct and consultative agents. IECE teachers are expected to support and follow policies and practices that align with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and the policy guidance that supports young disabled children's inclusion in high-quality early childhood programs (2015, 2023). Additionally, in the Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs, they described its shared vision which includes "people of all abilities be included in all facets of society throughout their lives as it benefits not only individuals with disabilities but also all individuals in all communities" (2023, p. 2). Young disabled children who are educated in inclusive settings deserve to see teachers who are like them: also disabled.

Persons with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the world (United Nations Enable, n.d.) and the percentage of college students with disabilities has increased over the past two decades (US Government Accountability Office, 2024). In 2019, 21% of undergraduates reported having a disability (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023) and many students with disabilities choose not to disclose their disability to their institute of higher education (IHE). Disabled persons hold unique and crucial insights on challenging cultural beliefs about normalcy and addressing the structural ableism embedded within education, including those held by many teacher educators in teacher preparation programs (Keefe, 2022). Though almost every university class is likely to have one or more disabled students enrolled, every disabled teacher candidate has a unique identity, set of strengths, and areas of needs. Most importantly, they offer unique knowledge and expertise that will better support their future students with disabilities and their families (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2016). Furthermore, "the experience of disability is relevant to all marginalized groups – for all groups have people with disabilities in them" (Anderson, 2006, p. 367). It is essential IECE teacher educators and teacher preparation programs act as models and create educational spaces that promote inclusivity, and work to recruit and retain disabled teacher candidates (Siuty & Beneke, 2020). Therefore, we call the field to ensure inclusivity and representation of individuals with disabilities in IECE teacher preparation programs.

Traditional Teacher Preparation Programs

Traditional general education and special education teacher preparation programs focus on identifying and "fixing" children with disabilities and their deficits, which has long-lasting impacts on students, teacher candidates, and teacher educators. Within general education teacher preparation programs, there persists a rigidity and battle between ensuring equity and quality with achievement of standards and maintaining accountability (Kofke & Morrison, 2021). Meanwhile, special education teacher preparation programs have prepared students to work with children with disabilities using practices that further exclude and ostracize disabled children and teacher candidates (Keefe, 2022; Lukins et al., 2023). Relying more on a medical model of disability, traditional teacher preparation for special education has positioned disability as a deficit, problem, or deficiency within the individual that needs to be "fixed" or "cured" through intervention or therapy (Ashby, 2012). The social model of disability, which positions disability as a social construct in which the environment, not an individual's impairments, creates barriers (Lawson & Beckett, 2021), may be most often described when discussing inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting (Freedman et al., 2019). However, mandates

associated with IDEA, including requiring students be labeled with a specific disability in order to receive services, or creating individualized goals specific only to a student's area(s) of deficit, are inherently more aligned with medical model approaches to disability (Freedman et al., 2019).

Past research has noted how deficit-oriented, non-normative approaches to disabilities can impact not only students, but also teachers and teacher candidates. Use of approaches where the focus is on a student's challenges or deficits can impact teachers' perceptions of disability and may result in students feeling stigmatized and struggling to be included by their non-disabled peers and teachers (Bialka et al., 2024). These same approaches also can impact teacher candidates and in-service teachers who may not choose to disclose their own disability because they fear exclusion and ostracism from teacher educators and colleagues (CEC, 2016; Strimel et al., 2023). Teacher candidates with disabilities have also reported feeling onerous to their teacher preparation programs and have encountered reticence or disinclination from program members concerned that accommodations could jeopardize the program's ability to maintain professional standards (Baldwin, 2007; Griffiths, 2012; Leyser & Greenberger, 2008, Strimel et al., 2023). Barriers such as these exist even though CEC (2006) (a national organization that, with its Division for Early Childhood [DEC], has established standards for professional preparation of special education teachers) has specifically acknowledged how teachers with disabilities can perform tasks with success when provided with the proper supports and accommodations.

GAO Report on Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

In April 2024, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) published the Report to Congressional Addressees on Higher Education - Education Could Improve Information on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities. This report includes the findings of a study conducted by the GAO to determine trends and characteristics related to college students with disabilities, challenges students with disabilities encountered in accessing college education and how these were mitigated, and how the Department of Education (DOE) helps mitigate these challenges. Because IHEs have a legal responsibility to ensure equal access to qualified students with disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 1973), colleges and universities must provide accommodations to students who self-identify as having a disability and provide documentation of their disability, and these institutions are prohibited from discriminating based on disabilities. However, the GAO's study found that disabled students continue to encounter barriers to academic success and graduate at a rate far less than nondisabled students. The GAO report cites data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017) which found that 47 percent of disabled students leave school without obtaining a degree, compared to 30 percent of students without disabilities. As a result of their study, the GAO suggests that disabled students may not receive the adequate preparation needed to self-advocate for accommodations in the collegiate environment, and IHE disability services staff may need additional means of staying current on key information specific to accommodations for disabled students.

Considering the field of IECE understands the need for and has had a commitment to providing high-quality education and care to *all* our youngest learners and their families (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2022), this is a call to action to

those in higher education to take further steps to model those inclusive early childhood teacher preparation program practices to support disabled teacher candidates. Within this paper we: (a) identify examples of current IECE teacher preparation program practices and the potential impacts they may have on teacher candidates with disabilities, (b) call on IECE teacher educators and preparation programs to utilize inclusive practices which can support all students, and then (c) suggest opportunities in research and policy to support and evaluate inclusive teacher preparation practices. This call to action has been co-authored by faculty members from three teacher preparation programs and disabled teacher candidates and teachers who are currently enrolled in or have recently completed their undergraduate teacher preparation programs within one of three midwestern public universities. Each disabled author has independently determined what information they wish to disclose about their disability.

- Arielle Taylor (she/her) is a first-generation college student. She is a 22-year-old African American woman entering her third professional semester in the Early Childhood program at Northern Illinois University (NIU). She is on the path to graduate in May 2025. Arielle has been diagnosed with Bipolar II Disorder and receives accommodations through the NIU Disability Resource Center.
- Benjamin D. Bershback (he/him) is a 2024 graduate of Bowling Green State University where he majored in special education. Ben received special education and related services for dyslexia and auditory processing disorder.
- Madison D. Schafer (she/her) majored in Early Childhood Special Education and minored in Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh. She is currently teaching first grade. Madison identifies as a person who is neurodivergent and received disability related services while attending University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh.
- Michelle M. Sands (she/her) received her doctoral degree from the University of Illinois in Special Education. She is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Special and Early Education at Northern Illinois University and teaches courses in the inclusive early childhood education program. Her research interests focus on supporting the alignment and continuity of practices between early childhood and elementary programs and supporting children with disabilities and their families during the transition to kindergarten.
- Sawyer Stein (they/them) is an autistic advocate entering their third professional semester at Northern Illinois University, with the hope of becoming a preschool teacher post-graduation in 2025. Motivated by their poor treatment by schools since early childhood, Sawyer was drawn to education with the goal of assisting disabled students who may not be identified for accommodations due to inequitable assessment practices. When referring to Sawyer in this paper, they will most often be referenced using identity-first labels (i.e. autistic, disabled, etc.) as is their preference.
- Stacy N. McGuire (she/her) received her doctoral degree from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in Special Education. She is currently an assistant professor of special education in the School of Inclusive Teacher Education at Bowling Green State University. Her research interests focus on providing equitable education for students with behavioral support needs and emotional and behavioral disorders. She has been diagnosed with a neurological disorder and identifies as a disabled individual.
- Stacey N. Skoning (she/her) is a professor in the Department of Special & Early Childhood Education at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, where she also spent 13

years as the department chair. Her research focuses on improving inclusive support for all students in general education settings. She has supported hundreds of students with a range of disabilities in PK-12 and in higher education.

CURRENT ISSUES IN TEACHER RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION, AND RETENTION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

As we consider the need for more inclusive teacher preparation programs, it is important to consider the current issues and how we can best address those issues. In preparing this paper we worked with our student writers to identify ways in which they have experienced issues within their teacher preparation programs, as well as the possible solutions and recommendations they have for addressing those issues based on their own experiences. Additionally, we have turned to the literature to support their recommendations and move towards more inclusive teacher preparation programs. The issues we will address in this call to action include: (a) belonging and perception of disability; (b) relationships, representation, and universal design for learning; (c) accommodations, accessibility, and supports; and (d) teacher dispositions.

Culture of Belonging and Perception of Disability

Belongingness is an important part of student academic success (Strayhorn, 2018; Sotardi, 2022). Ensuring all preservice teachers, including those with disabilities, perceive themselves as belonging at the IHE, in their program, and in the field of education is crucial. Yet, the stigma of, or negative attitudes towards disability that can exist among faculty, instructors, or support staff can create barriers that lead disabled teacher candidates to feel as if they do not belong, to struggle with imposter syndrome, or feel as if they are not capable of being a teacher. It is this unconscious or conscious ableism that can hinder disabled teacher candidates within IHEs (Strimel et al., 2023), including IECE teacher preparation programs. This can be seen through some of our authors' experiences:

> For me, it is not easy to talk about my mental health, and as a Black woman, most of our real everyday problems are seen as "excuses" rather than a problem. I find it hard to let people know my weaknesses because I want to be seen as strong, independent, and smart always, and not as the girl with bipolar disorder. I need to prove that I am just as smart and capable as my white counterparts, and I don't need anybody's help. It's hard for me to say, but in everyday life as a Black woman, I have to prove myself.

Teacher educators have an important role to prepare teacher candidates to be inclusive of all children in educational environments. When teacher educators promote and foster inclusive environments that cultivate strong, individualized identities, they are actively demonstrating how individuals with disabilities and their identities as disabled individuals matter. Yet, preservice teachers, particularly those preparing to become special education teachers, have traditionally been trained to identify and remediate problems or deviations from what is "normal" (Ashby, 2012) as part of the medical model of disability (Hayes & Hannold, 2007; Zaks, 2023). This medical model is the antithesis of one that supports a sense of belonging – rather it establishes

the individual with the disability as being abnormal or something that needs to be changed or normalized. Though it seems obvious that teacher educators should promote and foster inclusive environments and teach within this social model of disability, Strimel and colleagues (2023) recently identified several barriers to access and equity within teacher preparation programs. Barriers encountered by teacher candidates with disabilities include negative perceptions of teacher candidates, treating teacher candidates differently based on their disability, and a lack of access to varying educational experiences because of the candidates' disabilities (Bergerhuff et al., 2012; Parker & Draves, 2017; Siuty & Beneke, 2020; Squires & Countermine, 2018; Squires et al., 2018). Some of the long-term consequences of these barriers include lower likelihood of teacher candidates with disabilities' disclosing their disability or accessing adequate support from their teacher educators, particularly during field placement, and an increased likelihood of candidates leaving the field, having a damaged sense of identity, or both (Strimel et al., 2023).

The cultivation of a sense of belonging and critical awareness of disability may influence how teacher candidates with and without disabilities also educate young children with disabilities within IECE. Additionally, the creation of inclusive environments that place value on diversity is one way of supporting students' sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2024). It is the responsibility of teacher educators to create, model, and promote inclusive educational environments and practices for teacher candidates that can contribute to disabled individuals' sense of belonging and all teacher candidates' use of inclusive practice. These practices also align with those within DEC's Recommended Practices (2014) and NAEYC's position statement on Advancing Equity in Early Childhood (2019) and Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (2011).

Recommendations

- Create and facilitate a safe and student-centered classroom community for all students. At the start of the semester, having students identify core values, beliefs, create social norms and sign student commitments not only helps ensure a positive student-centered classroom community, but are opportunities to model practices they can use when collaborating with others in a school environment.
- Teach within a Disabilities Studies framework or use a critical lens to challenge biases which exist that can rely on assumptions and/or exclude children with disabilities and other minoritized populations (Ashby et al., 2012; Love & Beneke, 2021; Urbani et al., 2022). Teaching using the book *"Rethinking Disability: A Disability Studies Approach to Inclusive Practice"* (Valle & Conner, 2019) has helped all our candidates (early childhood, elementary, secondary, special education…) better understand the biases they hold and identify them on our campus. Last year the class reading this text searched for biased language on our campus and found many examples including a presentation being given that announced "All who walked through the door would…" They recognized that whether you could walk or not made little difference in the amount of benefit someone would gain from participation.
- Use an asset-based approach when discussing individuals with disabilities (Urbani et al., 2022). "To better support disabled teacher candidates, a colleague and I hosted a session on navigating the job market. We discussed when and how to disclose a disability when applying for teaching jobs and how to leverage our assets during the interview process."
- Use inclusive language and offer opportunities for individuals to share their own unique

perspectives, acknowledging that there may be individuals with disabilities within the classes being taught. Use language that includes students in possible disabled populations, does not assume that students are all neurotypical and able-bodied, and is respectful of adults with disabilities having unique perspectives and contributions non-disabled people can't provide.

- Incorporate perspectives of or resources from individuals with disabilities in classroom discussions. "I always appreciate it when professors talk about the differing perspectives of disabled adults on aids and therapies provided to disabled children. Recognizing that disabled people age and can advocate for their communities sends an important message to disabled students and abled peers who are not used to hearing disabled narratives."

Relationships, Representation, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Positive relationships with students, as well as transparent representation of disability among faculty and staff, and use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in coursework can support students with disabilities and their sense of belonging. A new theme among college courses is the limited representation of marginalized groups in course materials (Bird & Pitman, 2020; Brandle, 2020). However, when discussing marginalized groups, disability is often missing from the conversation. For example, a recent study examined open educational materials in political science to identify the extent to which marginalized groups were represented, specifically looking at race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+, and women (Brandle, 2020). Similarly, another study examined course materials in the hard and social sciences, only reporting on gender and ethnic representation (Bird & Pitman, 2020). Little attention is paid, however, to disability representation in course materials, especially in education. Scholars agree that representation is important and valid (Redding, 2019), and yet are not promoting representation when it comes to recruiting and retaining the group of educators who will work with our future disabled students.

In addition to using representative course materials, having faculty who have disabilities and are willing to disclose those disabilities can be beneficial to students. Just as before, there is literature supporting college student success when they have university professors of the same racial or ethnic background or of the same gender (Llamas et al., 2019). A disabled college student likely benefits in much of the same way. As reported by one of our authors:

> As a college student, I completely benefited from faculty disclosing about their own disabilities and about their own transparency of disabilities. This conversation that happened a couple times, allowed myself to feel comfortable talking about my disabilities, it allowed me to relate and build connections with my professor, and to become more knowledgeable to share to others with and without disabilities.

When faculty are open about their own disabilities, teacher candidates can see themselves succeed, see advocates in their teacher educators, and have a sense of belonging they may not have otherwise had.

Faculty can also use UDL when teaching. UDL is a framework for teaching built on Universal Design. Universal Design is a phenomenon that began in architecture, wherein structures

originally created for the disability community can be used by the general public for many reasons (Persson et al., 2014). A common example is the curb-cut effect. Curb cuts were originally designed for wheelchair users to access sidewalks. However, many people soon realized they were also useful for parents of young children in strollers, delivery persons with shipments on dollies, and travelers pulling luggage behind them.

Universal Design has since moved into educational spaces, where faculty (and teachers) can now use educational designs originally meant for the disability community for all students. UDL, one of the most common forms of Universal Design in education, provides multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement (CAST, 2018). As teacher educators we can teach, implement, and model appropriate UDL principles for our students. Our teacher candidates should be prepared to use UDL in their future classrooms; therefore, we should be prepared to teach them how to use such principles with fidelity. We also should feel comfortable implementing UDL in our own classrooms. By implementing UDL principles we can reach all learners, including those who have disabilities, in our teacher preparation courses. Finally, we should intentionally model UDL principles by explaining why we are making instructional decisions for our students. When we explain our instructional decisions, we show teacher candidates how they can make similar decisions in their future classrooms.

Teacher educators who recognize the importance of using representative materials in their classes, including materials that represent the disability community, can disclose their own relationship with disability, and/or are able to implement UDL principles through their teaching are more likely to build strong relationships with their students. We stress the importance of teacher-student relationships with our teacher candidates, and these same relationships are important for our teacher candidates. For example, one of our authors indicated:

> The relationships that I had between faculty was the reason that I was able to be successful in the program. Professors who were willing to open up and have conversations were extremely impactful.

Recommendations

- Use class materials that include people with disabilities (e.g., reading materials, videos, podcasts). If possible, use materials that include people from intersecting identities. "A classroom assignment I created was called a social media nano-ethnography. Teacher candidates explored a search term or hashtag that was created by the disability community (e.g., #AbleismExists, #WhenIWasADisabledKid, #DisabledWhileBlack) on a chosen social media platform. Then, they developed themes around the posts they found, discussed what they learned from the assignment, and how they could create more inclusive spaces for their disabled students."
- Create inclusive classroom norms and expectations. Create a class expectation that states, "Assume disabled people are in the class. Not all disabilities are visible so you may not know if there are people with disabilities in class. When discussing issues related to disability, be cognizant of the language you use." By creating a rule such as this, teacher educators are doing two things: (a) acknowledging that adults, too, have disabilities; and

(b) allowing teacher educators to consider how they discuss disability.
- Discuss your own relationship with disability. If you have a disability, disclose that information, the strengths you have because of your disability, and the accommodations you have in class. If you have a family member with a disability, discuss their strengths and the ways in which you accommodate their needs.
- Provide an open space for teacher candidates to share how they can accommodate class activities, assignments, and assessments, regardless of disability status. This allows teacher candidates to be an active part of their learning and for them to consider how they may accommodate their students in the future. All students regardless of ability benefit from accessibility. Options such as captions available during a lecture, multiple ways to access lecture notes, models available for assignments, and clear rubrics make all students more successful, and allow students with disabilities that are not identified to access coursework more easily. Basic accessibility should be baked into all pre-service programs.
- Collaborate with other faculty in creating spaces that are UDL friendly. "I co-taught methods courses in our elementary education program as a way to support teacher candidates and faculty simultaneously as they learned about UDL. This provided an opportunity to model co-teaching strategies and universal accommodations within the college classroom that would transfer to K-12 and support a wider range of teacher education candidates on our campus."

Access to the Accommodations and Support Necessary for Success

All students, regardless of ability, are entitled to an inclusive learning experience (Ashby, 2012). These supports can be provided through accessibility or accommodations. Accessibility is a change made to class materials or environmental structures that are provided to everyone (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003). An example of this might be to provide a copy of the slide deck on a course website so students can access it on their individual laptops in addition to seeing the slides on the board. Teacher educators can use accessibility to meet the needs of all teacher candidates in their classroom while also attending to the needs of an individual learner. Accommodations, in contrast, meet the needs of an individual learner by changing the way a task is presented but not what is being presented (Lazarus et al., 2006). An example of this may be providing a paper copy of the slide deck for an individual student to use for note taking while also presenting the slides on the board for the rest of the class. We, as teacher educators, are trained to understand that accommodations do not reduce the difficulty of a task but instead change how our students access the material (Lazarus et al., 2006). We also teach our teacher candidates how to use accommodations and accessibility in their own instruction, and our modeling of these techniques should be at the forefront of our repertoire. Both accessibility and accommodations are necessary and should be considered for academic coursework, assessment procedures, and field placements (Strimel, 2022). One of our authors explained the importance of accommodations this way:

> Accommodations should be personalized, specific, clear, and meaningful. The system as it is now is impersonal and difficult to navigate. The easier it is for students to get accommodations, professors to understand them, and students to make use of them, the better students with disabilities will perform.

Teacher educators do not need formal letters to provide accessibility or accommodations to individual students. However, having a formal accommodation letter is helpful in ensuring accommodations are legally required to be provided to teacher candidates. University Disability Resource Centers (DRCs) or services are those dedicated to supporting college students with disabilities. According to the National Center for College Students with Disabilities' Campus Disability Resource Database (2024), 200 public universities and 162 private, not-for-profit universities currently provide some type of disability-related services (i.e., coaching, tutoring, or testing to provide documentation of a disability). However, in most cases documentation of a disability is needed to access academic accommodations or services through DRCs. In the most recent survey from NCES, only 37 percent of students who identified themselves as having a disability disclosed their disability to their college (2022). Disabled teacher candidates may not know that additional support could be available to them through disability resource centers (DRCs) at their IHE or they may not think they need additional support. Although disabled students in college report using academic support services more often than those without a disability (NCES, 2022), there are more supports and services available that are underutilized. Our authors indicated they also had concerns related to accessing accommodations through their DRCs:

> Accommodations are too broad to be helpful, mental health is an area with additional challenges as many don't see it as a disability and financial aid only lets you use it 'as an excuse' one semester, college classroom accommodations don't transfer to the field well, and in general there is a lack of accountability for the provision of accommodations.

> Due to the length of time it took for accommodations to properly be put into place through the university, I was not able to receive the appropriate accommodations. The accommodation that I needed was simply, access to the lecture online through a recording or virtual meeting. When I was not able to receive this support, my grades were a reflection.

When students do utilize DRCs to access accommodations, barriers such as instructor's lack of implementation, and/or lack of relevance to courses not completed in a classroom or lecture room setting still exist. For example, DRCs are not always equipped to understand the goals and expectations placed on teacher candidates during their field and student teaching placements (Strimel, 2022). When teacher candidates are in the field, they are more likely to be unsuccessful or quit their program because of limited support. Keefe (2022) shared a vignette of an autistic student who excelled in her coursework, but upon entering her student teaching placement was not provided with support beyond what her nondisabled peers received. The teacher candidate failed her student teaching placement but was able to graduate with a degree in special education. Without a teaching license, though, she was only able to get a job for which she was overqualified.

Instructors in IHEs often do not understand how to apply a non-educational law to an educational space (Dieterich et al., 2017). There is no "IDEA" or other special education law to support the inclusive instruction in which teacher candidates should still be engaging. Instead, teacher

candidates are protected under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, neither of these laws are meant to be education laws, and instead provide supports to individuals in public places (Antilla-Garza, 2015). Although there is a legal responsibility for instructors to provide accommodations to students with disabilities, there is also an ethical one. Not providing or being hesitant to provide accommodations to disabled teacher candidates can make it challenging for them to access their instruction. In some cases, faculty have expressed concerns regarding fear the application of accessibility needs or accommodations will unfairly tailor instructional practices towards a small portion of the teacher candidates in a class, which will either make it easier for those candidates to complete class material or not allow them equal access to material therefore not allowing them to be fully prepared for their careers. One of our authors explained,

> I have often gotten pushback, confusion, and frustration with my needs from professors. Sometimes, they never confirm they read my letter or subsequent email clarifying my needs.

Another author explained that requesting accommodations provoked an anxious response:

> Being able to self advocate on what my accommodations were and how instructors were going to reply to me was anxiety provoking, due to the mystery of the unknown.

Our authors also shared ways that accommodations were helpful in their education:

> The adaptations that were granted to me were ones that would benefit my learning and allow processing time for me to answer questions at the right level.

Recommendations

- When provided with a letter of accommodations, identify ways in which the provided accommodations could be changed to accessibility needs for all teacher candidates in the classroom. "If a teacher candidate has an accommodation for a peer note taker, create a system that allows for a peer note taker for all students during each class session so all teacher candidates benefit from class-wide notes."
- Create opportunities for accessibility that will benefit all teacher candidates by providing as many materials as possible in open access methods. Use of open educational resources (i.e., open textbooks) are a more affordable or no-cost option for all students, and in most cases are easily reproduced in a variety of formats and modes to support a variety of learners' needs. Alternatively, e-book versions of a textbook can be purchased with unlimited use access; in many cases these are available in printable, text only, and screen reader friendly formats.
- Create opportunities for accessibility that will benefit all teacher candidates by providing materials in multiple formats (e.g., visually, auditorily, captioned). "The first night of class, I always teach students how to turn on captions in PowerPoint. The second class, they learn how to add alt text to images. The third

     class, they learn how to add captions to videos. Each class adds another skill. I
     model all of these by using them throughout the class to discuss accessibility of
     educational materials. In addition, I model having multiple options for learning by
     providing readings, podcasts, and video links to give students the opportunity to
     access information in multiple modes."

- Provide accommodations that can be implemented in field placements or create
accommodations for field placements. "Some examples of such accommodations
include, but are not limited to: assignment to clinical placements easily accessible
to public transportation routes, provision of more frequent check-ins with
university supervisor, etc."

Teacher Dispositions

Many teacher preparation programs use "dispositions" as a tool or measure to identify what skills
a teacher candidate has prior to entering the field. Truscott and Obiwo (2020) describe
dispositions as "the tendencies to act based on beliefs, values, attitudes and prior experiences" (p.
23). Fellner and Kwah (2018) explain that "one of the central goals of teacher education is to
instill and support dispositions in future teachers that welcome and value differences, whether in
race, class, culture, language, or ability" (p. 520). However, Fellner and Kwah (2018) explain
that although teacher educators are fostering a mindset that welcomes and values difference, they
are doing so in a way that aims to target one set of teacher candidates: middle class, white
teacher educators, who are the predominant teachers (i.e., 80% of teachers) in the field of
education today (NCES, 2022). This targeting of one group of teacher candidates is problematic
because it does not account for variance in race, ethnicity, class, culture, language, or ability, the
very dispositions we, as teacher educators, are trying to instill in our candidates.

Truscott and Obiwo (2020) interviewed teacher candidates about their perceptions of
dispositions. Teacher candidates reported that dispositions depend on context. They may
implement some of their dispositions differently with one child than they do another. The authors
also found that teacher candidates felt it was important to have a core set of dispositions based on
who they were as individuals. This core set of dispositions can be grounded in one's values,
based on an individual's race, ethnicity, class, culture, language, or ability. As teacher educators,
we have the duty to foster our candidates' values, based on their background, and help them
establish their own core set of dispositions. Then, they can adapt those core values to the specific
context in which they are being applied.

While the conflation of dispositions and disability is described and deconstructed in the literature
(Bialka, 2015) in relation to the ideas of power and privilege within teacher education programs,
the focus is primarily on the beliefs about disability held by the teacher candidates. What is
missing from the literature is any discussion regarding the beliefs held about the teacher
candidates themselves. The authors of this paper have observed that dispositions can be easily
blamed, targeted, and rationalized as another way to exclude disabled teacher candidates from
completing education programs. One example from the field is a candidate who was regularly
arriving late or absent from her clinical placement. A meeting was scheduled to notify that
candidate of a dispositional concern and a remediation plan was to be written. However, when

meeting with the candidate it became clear that she was staying up late to complete assignments from a previous semester (when health concerns arose leading to several incomplete grades in courses) while trying to complete a new full semester of assignments and clinical work. She was staying up late working on assignments, then sleeping through multiple alarms. This candidate was demonstrating exactly the dispositions that she should be, but did not have the organization and planning skills to do this in a way that still allowed her to meet all her requirements. Rather than remediating a disposition, that form was put away and appropriate accommodations were provided to help with sequencing work, organizing timelines, and allowing focus on one task at a time. With those supports in place, the candidate was able to successfully complete two semesters of course work in a semester and an additional month in the summer. She is now back on track to complete her licensure programs.

Recommendations

- Avoid using standardized dispositions for all students. Have each teacher candidate create their own self-assessment of teacher dispositions which can be used by themselves, their university supervisors, and their cooperating teachers.
- Instead of "remediating" teacher candidates based on missed/failed dispositions, consider ways in which a teacher candidate's strengths may be used to support their areas of need. One situation that comes to mind is when an autistic teacher candidate was not greeting students as they came into the classroom. A university supervisor began to tally the number of students this candidate greeted, unbeknownst to him. The university supervisor used this information to point out that the teacher candidate lacked appropriate dispositions and needed remediation so he could form proper relationships with students. Instead of providing remediation, it is helpful to identify the teacher candidate's strengths, leverage those, and use them to support possible areas of need.
  Another teacher candidate with a learning disability, struggled to write on the board with proper spelling. After discussion, this was identified as not disposition-related and appropriate supports were provided that included preparing slides in advance and projecting type-written materials on the board instead of writing to make use of spell-check and grammar-check, which was also a great model for his middle school students.

CONCLUSION

Teacher educators in programs specifically designed for IECE are positioned to develop teacher candidates who will educate and support our newest generation. Many of these youth will come from the world's largest minority group: the disability community. Yet, disabled teacher candidates are more likely to drop out of college, never enter the field, or leave the field early (BPS, 2017; Strimel et al., 2023) because they feel ostracized by a field that should be embracing them (CEC, 2016; Keefe, 2022; Lukins et al., 2023). Instead, we, as teacher educators, should be setting up systems that embrace the many strengths disabled teachers and disabled teacher candidates have. When we create teacher preparation programs that promote belonging and a positive perception of disability, develop relationships through representation and UDL, provide accommodations and accessibility, and allow teacher candidates to design their own dispositions

based on their unique strengths and needs, we can recruit IECE teacher candidates who will be more likely to remain in the field. More importantly, young, disabled children will see a teacher who is just like them. To ensure we are recruiting and retaining disabled teacher candidates we propose implications for research, policy, and programs.

Implications for Research

Much of the current literature pertaining to disabled teacher candidates is limited and focuses on their perceptions of teacher preparation programs. Researchers may consider broadening their view to include the success of both teachers and students with disabilities, so we have a better understanding of why disabled teachers are needed in the field. Such research may draw upon similar research which has been done to examine the importance of racially and ethnically minoritized teachers in classrooms. Similarly, very little research has been conducted examining teacher dispositions for disabled teacher candidates and for teacher candidates from intersecting identities. Researchers may consider ways in which dispositions can be further explored and how they can be developed in a way that is more relevant to a diverse group of teacher candidates. Finally, researchers may consider examining the benefits of a disability studies informed teacher preparation program compared to traditional teacher preparation programs, specifically examining how such programs may help teacher candidates better understand the experiences of disabled students.

Implications for Policy

With only 37 percent of disabled students disclosing their disability to their university's DRC, it is important to consider how DRCs are supporting (or not supporting) their disability communities. IHEs may consider establishing more rigorous policies to ensure faculty are educated on the implementation of accommodations in coursework so students are more comfortable disclosing their disabilities. Similarly, programs may consider working with their DRCs to explore policy changes for field placements and other in-vivo experiences. Ensuring disabled teacher candidates can access both coursework and field placements equitably is necessary for them to be retained. However, the current structure does not always allow for accommodations to be available during field work experiences.

Implications for Programs

Programs may consider the ways in which faculty within the program view disability. As one of our authors indicated, many programs view disability as a "child issue" instead of an "adult issue." This can be problematic because there are teacher candidates with disabilities. If we want to retain our disabled teacher candidates, we need to approach disability with the understanding that there are always disabled people around us. Creating a common language and structure for how disability will be supported within a program is an initial step that can be taken to ensure disabled teacher candidates are adequately recruited and retained within an IECE program. Then, programs can consider how they are representing the disability community within their program

and courses. Using materials and hiring faculty that represent the disability community will show disabled teacher candidates that disability is seen as an asset to the program instead of a problem that needs to be fixed. This will further ensure disabled teacher candidates are retained within the IECE program.

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