

Chapter 6

Disability Studies and Behavioral Science in Teacher Education: Preparing Future Teachers to Serve in Inclusive Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This chapter positions inclusive education as an important site for teacher education reform. The need to prepare all teachers for a role in educating students with autism spectrum disorder and other disabilities is evident by the growing population of students receiving special education services in general education classrooms. In the chapter the authors explore integration of disability studies and applied behavioral analysis into teacher education programs. Integrating disability studies into teacher preparation coursework can work to shift attitudes about disability and student learning. Applied behavioral analysis coursework can shift perspectives of the nature of behavior and prepare teachers to address behavior problems. The authors make recommendations for how to integrate these two disciplines into program coursework.

INTRODUCTION

Intersections between general and special education are important sites for teacher preparation reform (Blanton et al., 2018). Recent years have shown the agenda for special education has become one of inclusive education, deeming the placement of students in physical spaces non-disabled peers, and access to general curriculum as a rationale for appropriate education. In this chapter inclusive education is viewed as an important intersection between general and special education. Considering 39.93 percent

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of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in K-12 public school spend 80 percent of the day in general education classrooms (US Department of Education, 2015), inclusive education highlights the importance of preparing all future educators to serve students with ASD. Despite a growing need to serve students with ASD in general education classrooms, teacher education programs have yet to address the need to better prepare future teachers to serve students with ASD (Mazin, 2011).

Teachers' attitudes about inclusive education are influenced by a larger set of beliefs about the nature of disability, and the ways in which learning occurs (Jordan et al., 2009). Common attitudes and practices in education often pathologize students with learning differences which reaffirms the medical model of disability as the theoretical foundation for special education services. Attitudes toward disability undergird the way teachers approach their roles and responsibilities as a teacher in inclusive classrooms. Adherence to the medical model of disability, and the practice of pathologizing difference, reinforces hypothetical constructs of ability, and removes responsibility from the teacher to consider environmental factors that influence learning. In order to shape teacher attitudes and dispositions toward disability, theoretical and practical foundations for accepting and even embracing learning differences should be emphasized in teacher preparations.

The authors of this chapter assert a two-fold approach to teacher education programing. On one hand, disability studies in education (DSE) provides a theoretical foundation for rethinking the nature of disability and how learning occurs. By embracing the social model of disability, DSE emphasizes differences in ability as socially constructed notions, while also debunking the notion of normalcy. On the other hand, applied behavior analysis (ABA) provides a practical foundation for teaching technologies based on students' strengths, and elements in the environment where teaching occurs. Rather than instruction that stems from perceptions related to a diagnosis, ABA leverages observable skills and the ways learners prefer to navigate learning. This chapter is organized in two main sections. The first main section covers the integration of DSE into teacher preparation programs. The second main section covers the integration of applied behavior analysis studies in teacher preparation coursework. The purpose of including this coursework is to shape the ways future teachers view behaviors in the classroom, and to prepare teachers to address behaviors in the classroom that may be related to ASD.

DISABILITY STUDIES IN EDUCATION AND TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

In recent years the agenda for special education has become one of inclusive education, deeming the placement of students in physical spaces non-disabled peers, and access to general curriculum as a rationale for appropriate education. Disability studies scholars who are vetted in the field of education have called to question teacher preparation for inclusion, stating that the special/general education divide does not adequately prepare teachers to provide inclusive education (Florian, 2019; Pugach, 2020). The separated nature of special education and general education teacher preparation assumes that the responsibility of educating students with disabilities lies exclusively with the special education teacher. This section on disability studies in education (DSE) covers the integration of critical disability scholarship into teacher preparation programs for the purpose of broadening understandings of disability as a social construct for all prospective teachers. Transforming beliefs about the nature of disability

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