

Chapter 4

Best Practices in Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

Research regarding best practice for preparing both special education and general education teachers for inclusion has been sparse in the US. The purpose of this chapter is to systematically review and summarize research regarding teacher preparation for inclusion. A thorough search uncovered 35 relevant studies. Themes that emerged from analysis of this research of best practices for teacher preparation for inclusive education included content for inclusion infused in teacher education courses, attention early and often to attitudes and dispositions toward inclusion, opportunities for collaboration and co-teaching, strong university-school partnerships, and collaboration to teacher education faculty.

INTRODUCTION

For at least four decades, educators and researchers around the world have questioned the appropriateness of self-contained special education classes and argued for a more inclusive learning environment for all students (Croll & Moses, 2000; Dunn, 1968; Kraska & Boyle, 2014). Research on inclusive education has focused on teacher attitudes and perceptions towards inclusion, teacher efficacy in the use of inclusive practices, and teacher preparation for inclusive practices. In 1989, Allington and McGill-Franzen

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proposed a collaborative effort of general education and special education pre-service teachers to create a collective knowledge that would allow all teachers to meet all students' needs. While countries worldwide have extensively researched the topic, little work has been done in the United States to explore this proposal. In their survey of 109 elementary education bachelor's degree programs, Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson (2013) found that while most programs offer courses related to characteristics of disabilities and classroom management, few offer courses specifically related to differentiation of instruction or collaboration between general and special education. Similarly, in their survey of 703 faculty from teacher education programs across the United States, Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman and Merbler (2010) found that while institutions were offering course work related to disabilities, opportunities for teacher candidates to have experience with individuals with disabilities and opportunities to collaborate in their field placements, there is a need for more cross collaboration in teacher education courses.

BACKGROUND

Researchers consistently find gaps in knowledge of licensed teachers. For example, Gable, Tonelson, Sheth, Wilson, and Park's (2012) study surveyed teacher perspectives regarding the importance and level of preparation of working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. These teachers were asked about their use of particular practices that are known evidence-based strategies for use with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Both special education and general education teachers responded that they felt ill-equipped to teach social skills. Their findings suggest a clear gap in teachers' abilities to work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders and that much more work is needed with pre-service educators in this area.

A meta-analysis of 32 qualitative studies regarding co-teaching practices in inclusive settings (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007) concluded that while co-teachers were supportive of engagement in co-teaching for inclusive practices, more training was needed to help teachers do so effectively.

The aim of this chapter is to review the existing research on the preparation of teachers for providing inclusive education services to children and youth in the United States. The primary research question we explored was:

What is the current state of inclusive education teacher preparation practices in the United States?

- What is level of knowledge and skills teacher candidates have regarding inclusive practice in the United States?
- What are the attitudes and efficacy of teacher candidates in the United States?
- What is the structure of existing inclusive education programs in the United States?

METHOD

We used a multi-step process to search for relevant studies on teacher preparation and inclusive teaching practices. We first outlined clear, specific search terms to find studies in the United States pertaining to inclusion. This search was restricted by time period, spanning two decades of research from 1996-2016. We used the terms "teacher preparation" and "inclusion" for our initial search. An additional search was completed using the same databases with the terms "pre-service" and "inclusion". A final search, using

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