


Chapter 8

The Public Relations of Inclusion: Teacher Preparation, UDL, and Reframing for Autism Inclusion

Jessica Block Nerren

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4337-2392>

California State University, San Bernardino, USA

ABSTRACT

Preliminary teachers call out for more preparation for autism inclusion in their credential programs. The purpose of this study is to explore the framing of autism inclusion by professors of multiple and single subject preliminary teacher candidates. Data were collected using a qualitative single embedded intrinsic case study design employing focus groups, document review, and external scoring to a frame scale. Themes that arose included human interest and proposed solutions, with increasing specificity to autism, and social construction following reframing. Practical implications from this study include meaningful understanding and support for professors who prepare preliminary teacher candidates.

INTRODUCTION

Perception becomes reality. Public relations, commonly understood as a management function between an organization and its key publics, is a tool for impacting perceptions or actions (PRSSA, n.d.). However, in a thorough review of current and historical public relations literature (Bernays, 1928; Bolman et al., 2017; Borah, 2011; Cacciatore et al., 2016; Fairhurst, 2005; Forlin, 2010; Goffman, 1974; Keogh, 2013; Murphree, 2015; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Russell & Lamme, 2016; Schedin, 2017; Scheufele, 1999; Tye, 2002; Valentino et al., 2001), public relations has not been studied previously as it relates to the inclusion of people with autism. Although autism inclusion remains a significant focus for public education (Busby et al., 2012; Crosland et al., 2012; Finch et al., 2013; Hassanein, 2015; IDEA, 2004; Loiacono & Valenti, 2010; Morgan, 2015; Sansosti, & Sansosti, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2012),

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5103-8.ch008

the frames surrounding preparing teachers for autism inclusion in education remain to be explored in a public relations context. Framing theory states that frames help us make sense of the world (Bolman et al., 2017; Borah, 2011; Cacciatore et al., 2016; Fairhurst, 2005; Forlin, 2010; Goffman, 1974; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Schedin, 2017; Scheufele, 1999; Valentino et al., 2001). In other words, frames affect perception (Bolman et al., 2017; Borah, 2011; Cacciatore et al., 2016; Fairhurst, 2005; Forlin, 2010; Goffman, 1974; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Schedin, 2017; Scheufele, 1999; Valentino et al., 2001). Frames affect reality by shaping perception and also how people act upon that perception (Bolman et al., 2017; Goffman, 1974; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Scheufele, 1999).

This reframing study sets out to expand knowledge regarding professors of preliminary teacher candidates and their relationship to teaching inclusion of individuals with autism to future general education teachers. Two research questions guide the study:

RQ1: How do professors frame autism inclusion when they prepare future teachers?

RQ2: How does a public relations “reframing” of autism inclusion affect perceptions of the professors teaching future teachers?

Autism inclusion has many different frames and is perceived in numerous ways within general education settings (Howell, 2010; IDEA, 2004; Morgan, 2015; Rossa, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Walters, 2013; Wilder, 2013). A study on the framing of autism inclusion upstream, in teacher preparation settings can inform many processes that span both higher education and K12 settings. It is important to mention early that teachers call out for more preparation for autism inclusion in their preservice programs (Bryant, 2018; Busby et al., 2012; Finch et al., 2013; Loiacono & Valenti, 2010; Morgan, 2015; Robertson et al., 2003; Walters, 2012).

Teacher preparation for inclusion is potentially influenced and informed by the frames of inclusion held by professors of general education teacher candidates. A reframing qualitative case study examines and informs this process of teacher preparation as it relates to autism inclusion.

BACKGROUND

Using qualitative case study methodology, frames related to the perception of inclusion among professors of preliminary teacher candidates were examined by the study. The studied population came from a teacher credential program at a single public four-year institution. The study used focus groups and document review to prompt discussions of the experiences, needs, pressures, and challenges of professors of preliminary credential programs of autism inclusion.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) criteria is an essential part of the preliminary credential program (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016; Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2017). However, based on a preliminary document review, it may or may not be minimally taught in the credential programs. Universal Design for Learning is the process of building accessibility into course design and delivery from the start (Rose, 2001) instead of as an accommodation. UDL is the most relevant element within the Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs defined in key terms at end of chapter and is essentially a necessary standard to be met for a teacher candidate to become a teacher) related to the framing of autism inclusion. For a preliminary teacher candidate to become a credentialed new teacher, that teacher candidate must demonstrate knowledge and proficiency in UDL (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016; Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2017). The presence of a TPE element for UDL means that UDL must be taught by the preliminary credential teacher

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