

Chapter 1

“Walking the Talk” in Special Educator Preparation for Neurodiversity

Serra De Arment

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7752-7108>

Virginia Commonwealth University, USA

Taryn Goodwin Traylor

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5907-9874>

Virginia Commonwealth University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a model for the preparation of special education teachers for supporting the learning and development of neurodiverse children and youth as well as neurodiverse future special educators. The model is anchored by three inclusive learning frameworks that are as important for teacher educators to implement in preparation programs as they are for teacher candidates to learn as emerging special education professionals: universal design for learning, person centered planning and adaptive expertise. This call for teacher educators to “walk the talk” of inclusive teaching provides research evidence and practical examples for implementation across coursework and fieldwork experiences for teacher candidates. Interdisciplinary applications of the model for enhancing the preparation of professionals in other fields for meeting the needs of neurodiverse individuals are also discussed.

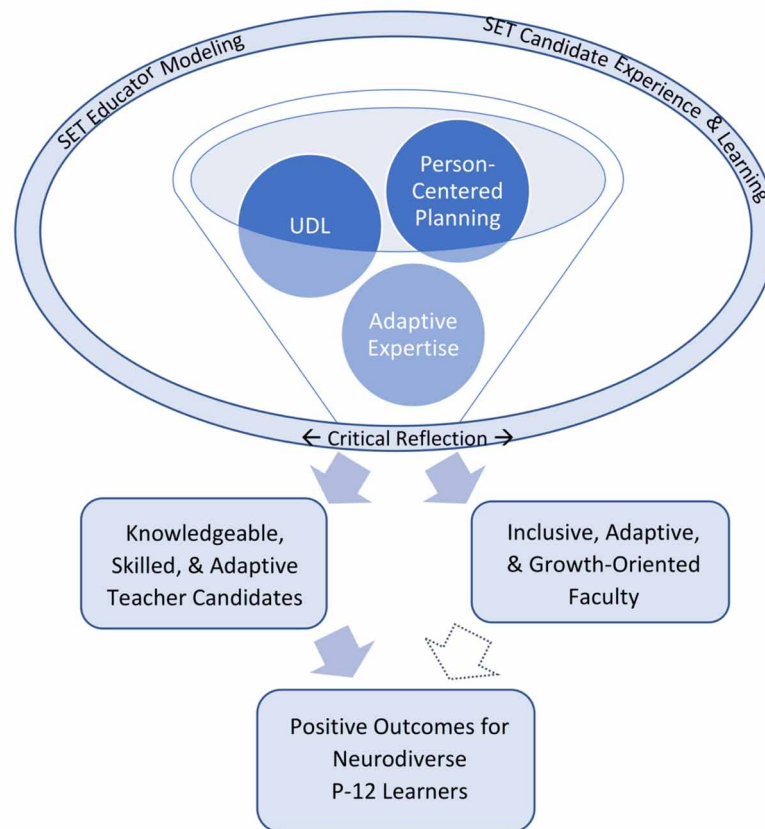
INTRODUCTION

In special education teacher (SET) preparation, SET educator faculty run the risk of being solely focused on preparing teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills for working with P-12 students with disabilities over simultaneously attending to the learning and accessibility needs of diverse SET candidates themselves. For many college students in special education teacher preparation programs, neurodiversity is relevant as a context for their future special education practice and as a lived experi-

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ence, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed. In this chapter, we propose that intentional and transparent SET educator modeling of inclusive teaching practices and SET educator-SET candidate shared critical reflection on those practices can be transformative for the learning and growth of teacher candidates and faculty alike. When SET educators give equal attention to (1) teaching SET candidates to be inclusive and impactful professionals and (2) their embodiment of those same inclusive and impactful practices in higher education, there is intentionality in “walking the talk” of special education teaching practices. This dual focus not only supports neurodiverse SET candidates, it also fosters the opportunity for collective critical reflection among faculty and teacher candidates for mutual benefit and growth. In turn, SET faculty and SET teacher candidates enhance the potential for positive impact on the learning and outcomes of neurodiverse children and youth.

Figure 1. A model for inclusive practices in special educator preparation for positive outcomes for neurodiverse p-12 learners



As illustrated in Figure 1, in this chapter we highlight a structure for SET educator modeling and SET candidates’ direct experiences of three key frameworks for preparation for working with neurodiverse P-12 learners: universal design for learning, person-centered planning, and adaptive expertise. SET educator modeling and SET candidate lived experiences within these frameworks can occur across coursework

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