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A Note from the Conference Chair and Proceedings Editor

The annual TED Conference in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania this year was superb! There were so many exceptional presentations, posters, roundtables, networking opportunities, and more. The TED conference is back to pre-pandemic numbers of attendees and the energy throughout the sessions was palpable. The TED publications and communications committee is pleased to present the TED 2024 Conference Proceedings!

This year, all sessions at TED were invited to submit for the proceedings, including roundtables, posters, and Kaleidoscope presenters. In addition, the submission requirements and formatting were amended to be simpler and reflect key information from TED sessions. In total, 46 sessions were submitted for the proceedings. Please note that individual authors are responsible for content accuracy.

We appreciate the time and effort submitting authors and the editorial team dedicated to these proceedings. Our mission is to facilitate the sharing of research, best-practices, and innovative ideas. The TED Conference Proceedings is one small way to foster collaboration and communication among TED members and build community.

We hope you find the TED Conference Proceedings to be a valuable contribution to the publication of all the important work we are doing.

See you all in Kansas City, MO, November 11th – 14th for TED 2025!

Brannan Meyers
Conference Chair

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FORGING AHEAD WITH INNOVATION AND ALIGNMENT: REINVENTING PRESERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION COURSEWORK FOR REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Abstract

Designing the scope and sequence of courses "within the special education major" includes tension between the time required to deliver content and the logistics of incorporating field-based practice. This paper offers one program's perspective on realigning methods courses to emphasize practice-based teaching, co-teaching, and case studies to enhance effectiveness.

Background/Rationale

School districts across the nation face significant challenges in attracting and retaining high-quality, effective special educators. While field experiences in preservice programs are essential for preparing future special educators (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017), the preparation prior to the field experience must be thoughtfully studied and planned. Special educators who encounter a misalignment between their teacher preparation program and their initial teaching position are more likely to leave the field early (Backes et al., 2024). Therefore, incorporating various experiences and simulating diverse teaching scenarios in preservice special educator coursework can cultivate well-prepared, well-rounded teacher candidates.

Beginning in the summer of 2020, the faculty in our Department of Special Education (SPED) started reflecting on teaching practices and course offerings for junior-year students (Year 1) in their SPED program. Consequently, the faculty team identified several areas for improvement and potential redevelopment of the SPED course offerings "within major" to ensure that pre-service special education teachers (PSSETs) in Year 1 received opportunities to engage in real-world, evidence-based practices applicable in the field. A realignment was necessary between two courses: a course on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Assistive Technology, and Instructional Technology for students with disabilities, and a course on Curriculum and Methods for Instruction in Special Education. This project is ongoing and is currently in its fourth year.

Key Session Takeaways

We engaged in several key activities as part of our efforts to realign the targeted SPED courses. These activities included reviewing syllabi, developing common case studies, integrating practice-based teaching opportunities, fostering collaboration among instructors, and gathering ongoing feedback from students and faculty. The goal was to create a more cohesive and effective experience for PSSETs as they began in the program in Year 1. A primary focus of the realignment was to ensure that the two courses did not duplicate content but instead built upon each other. To do this, we examined and compared the syllabi for both courses, breaking them down into weekly activities. This allowed instructors to identify overlaps and adjust the content, pedagogy, and practice-based activities to ensure a logical progression.

Collaboration between instructors was the cornerstone of our realignment process. Faculty that taught the aligned courses participated in multiple summer and winter workshops, working closely with assigned "teaching partners" to synchronize course materials and assignments. Course leads facilitated communication among all instructors of the two key courses to ensure alignment. Throughout the academic year, teaching pairs co-taught courses when possible and met weekly to discuss student progress, adjust course content as needed, and address areas where students required additional instruction based on formative assessments. This co-planning experience mirrored the co-teaching models that we aimed to instill in our preservice teachers, as noted by Cannaday et al. (2021), who suggested that such models can positively influence PSSET's future teaching practices.

A key element of our realignment was incorporating Practice-Based Teacher Education (PBTE) pedagogies. PBTE allows preservice teachers to engage in simulated teaching experiences, enabling them to practice and refine their skills before entering clinical settings (Practice-Based Teacher Education Pedagogies, n.d). Our realignment emphasized high-leverage practices (HLPs), such as modeling instruction (McLeskey et al., 2017). For example, in a culminating assignment, students were required to plan, model, and record a lesson incorporating UDL and evidence-based practices for teaching learners with disabilities. They then provided self-reflection and peer feedback, fostering a critical analysis of teaching practices (Nagro et al., 2017).

To further enhance PBTE, we developed common case studies based on real student experiences in special education. These case studies, informed by input from families, teachers, and faculty, simulated the assets and challenges faced by students receiving special education services. By engaging with these case studies, PSSETs gained valuable insight into real-world teaching scenarios, strengthening their problem-solving and decision-making skills in education.

Ongoing student feedback collected from unofficial course evaluations highlights the positive impact of our course realignment. Students appreciated the integrated nature of the courses, describing them as "one big class." While some found the complexity of courses overwhelming, they valued the collaborative efforts among instructors and the alignment of case studies. Further research is necessary to assess the realignment's long-term effectiveness and to identify additional successes and challenges.

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THE CONFLUENCE OF PERCEPTIONS – REBRANDING SPECIAL EDUCATION

Abstract

Presenters identified elements in special education teacher attrition and explained how the central issue is lack of clarity in the job of a special education teacher. A process to clarify the essential aspects of a SET's job and provide better communication, job satisfaction and student outcomes was presented.

Background/Rationale

The need for special education teachers (SET) has been well documented as a critical shortage area for years. This year 42 states plus Washington DC reported a shortage of special education teachers (National Center for Education Statistics: NCES, 2023). Teacher attrition in special education is well documented and complex. Researchers have indicated that the attrition of SETs is related to multiple factors, among them working conditions, lack of administrative support, teacher self-efficacy, poor peer collaboration and ambiguous job definition (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bettini et al., 2020; Leko et al., 2024; and Mason-Williams et al., 2020). When examining the elements that contribute to teacher attrition, it is evident that they are interactive and not isolated contributors to SET attrition. We see this clearly when we examine the conceptualization of working conditions as presented by Billingsley et al. (2020) which defines it as "including (a) SET roles and responsibilities which place particular demand on them and (b) support, including school culture and leadership, interactions between colleagues, professional development, and the logistical supports that help SETs meet their demands for providing effective instruction(e.g., schedules, materials, technology)" (p. 8). Some contributors to attrition like administrative support, teacher collaboration, and clearly defined job roles and responsibilities are contained in this definition and individually recognized as contributors to SET attrition. Because these elements have a compounding effect on teacher attrition, it is important that we develop methods to address improvement in all t3hree areas which should then also improve the overall working conditions as well. The need for interventions that will positively affect the attrition rate of SETs is clear. We need these interventions more now than ever as the movements towards standards-based education and inclusive practices have intensified the already existing special education teacher burnout (Billingsley et al., 2020) because the job demands have broadened and increased resulting in an even more ambiguous understanding of the SETs job. Researchers have found that elements like working conditions and perception of respect among peers and the public are reasons some college students do not go into education or preservice teachers consider and even actually drop special education as a career path (Mason-Williams, 2020).

Key Session Takeaways

How do we change the tide towards retention of special education teachers? Maybe we need to take a page out of the business world and Rebrand the Special Education Teacher. Rebranding is defined on The Economic Times website as "the process of changing the corporate image of an organization. It is a marketing strategy of giving a new name, symbol, or change in design for an already-established brand." To rebrand, professionals need to clearly define the job of a special education teacher. Mason-Williams (2020) reports that the job of a general education teacher is much more clearly defined than that of a special education teacher. The argument could be made that the job of a SET has not really changed. A SET's job is to use assessment data and knowledge of a student with a disability to create an educational program with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team that will enable the student to access learning opportunities and close the academic gaps that exist in relation to grade-level standards and overall adaptive behaviors. SETs will do this using evidence-based instructional methods. It is important to understand that defining a SETs job is not the same as listing the possible roles they may undertake while doing their job. Researcher have illustrated how the increasingly broadening roles assigned to SETs is a major reason for burnout (Mason-Williams et al., 2020; Billingsley and Bettini, 2019; Bettini et al. 2020; Miesner, 2022; and Gilmour et al. 2023). Billingsley et al. (2019) along with others pointed out that teacher preparations faculty are well positioned to have an impact on teacher attrition and have a responsibility to act. University faculty have a duty to prepare preservice SETs for the roles and responsibilities of the job. The key is in understanding that the roles should not be constantly and endlessly growing; they should be founded in the SETs job description and prioritized by direct connection to the developed educational plan. If, as described by researchers, new and experienced SETs need to be able to advocate for reasonable and appropriate job roles, the profession should have a clear idea of what they are and guidelines for how to determine if new roles are needed and appropriate.

Through "rebranding" we take control of our professional identity and will be able to articulate that role to other stakeholders. Having leadership that is supportive was listed by researchers as one of the main factors that can affect attrition and retention rates (Conley & You, 2017; Bettini, 2020; Stark et al., 2023; Leko et al. 2024). University faculty can collaborate with leadership programs to establish a better-defined job description and roles of SETs and provide training to administrators. Along with administrators, having general education colleagues who share in this clear understanding of a SET's job and roles can positively affect SET attrition and retention. Lack of positive collaboration with colleagues is listed by multiple researchers as a contributor to SET attrition (Bettini, 2017; Conley & You, 2017; Leko et al. 2024). In fact, Scheeler et al. (2022) state that SET reports higher rates of workplace bullying which includes feeling forced by colleagues in tasks and roles that are not part of their job. Preservice programs and in-service training can start by teaching SETs at all levels how to define their job and job roles, how to manage and prioritize their job roles, how to advocate for themselves and their students' needs with administrators, colleagues, and other stakeholders. Simultaneous Rebranding and educating leadership and peers can have an integrated approach to positively impact the retention rate of SETs and the instructional services of students with disabilities.

Additional Resources

- *TEACHING Exceptional Children* article on using data to communicate with administrators: https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059920972438
- Google drive with shared resources: https://tinyurl.com/2nb9ab53

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SPECIAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Abstract

Private schools have autonomy to decide what special education services are available to students with disabilities. Principals are often instrumental in making these school-based decisions and communicating with parents regarding available support. Research was shared that explored how principals make these programming and enrollment decisions regarding special education. This research resulted in a model, "Special Education Program Development in Christian Schools" which outlines how principals use honest communication and collaboration reflective of their school's mission with the goal of "getting it right" for students with disabilities.

Background/Rationale

Parentally placed private school students have rights under IDEA 2004 (Eigenbrood, 2010; US OSEP, 2022), but these provisions are different than for students who receive services in public schools. Private, faith-based schools are not required to provide special education services equivalent to what students with disabilities would receive in public schools (Eigenbrood, 2010; Russo et al., 2011), although the majority of Christian schools do provide some level of assistance for these students (Bello, 2006; DeFiore, 2013; Lane, 2017). Individual nonpublic schools decide if special education services will be provided, as well as what specific services will and will not be provided to students with disabilities.

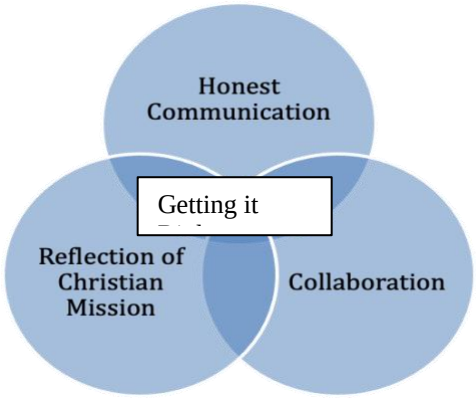
Christian schools are largely autonomous and have governance structures that allow decisions to be made on a school level. Therefore, much of the decision-making power lies within the individual school and its specific hierarchy, which often includes the school principal, the school board, and the pastor(s) of the affiliated church (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities, 2015; Keenan, 2007; Schafer, 2004; Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2017; Sheehan, 1997; Stob, 2015). These schools make independent decisions about what special education services will be provided based on many factors, such as perceived need, budget, and available personnel. The role of the principal is central to special education services in Christian schools due to this decision-making power and the less stringent regulations to provide services to students with disabilities.

The model "Special Education Program Development in Christian Schools" (Bratton, 2020) was developed to the need to fill the gap in the research on how private, faith-based schools can make appropriate decisions for students with disabilities who are enrolled by their parents. The research clearly shows that this population is increasing, and faith-based schools cannot ignore the call to provide an appropriate education for all students, including those with disabilities.

Key Session Takeaways

The model "Special Education Program Development in Christian Schools" depicted in Figure 1 shows that at the center of the principal's decisions and daily role is the concept of getting it right. Getting it right in special education for Christian school principals looks different in every setting, but it is the result of honest communication, collaboration, and the reflection of Christian mission coming together to guide decisions and set up appropriate services for students with disabilities. There are ways that the individual categories stand alone and hold importance in a principal's role, but also many ways that these categories overlap with each other and with the idea of getting it right in order to effectively develop and implement special education programs. Principals approach special education program development in Christian schools with the goal of providing beneficial services designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities. They want to "get it right" for these students and their families, but funding, lack of resources and personnel, and lack of a connection to the school's mission can cause barriers.

Figure 1. *Model of Special Education Program Development in Christian Schools*



Note. From "'Getting it Right': A Grounded Theory Construction of Principals' Decision Making About Special Education Services in Christian schools in the United States," by K. S. Bratton, 2020, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Copyright 2020 by Kara Bratton.

One key implication from this research is that Christian schools need clear processes and communication regarding special education. Schools should articulate what accommodations and specialized instruction they offer and document these services for parents and individual students with disabilities. Parents should also receive clear communication on their child's progress and specific interventions that are part of the school day. There are national organizations that specifically support special education in Christian schools, along with local LEA resources. Special education in Christian schools can be developed and improved by identifying and utilizing these resources. Training in inclusive practices can be provided to teachers, along with establishing an MTSS framework to prevent and provide intervention when needed. These practices should reflect the school's mission and open the doors for students with disabilities to be included in Christian schools with appropriate special education services.

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PROJECT COORDINATE: USING CONTENT-FOCUSED LESSON STUDY TO IMPROVE GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS KNOWLEDGE, INSTRUCTIONAL SKILL, AND COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

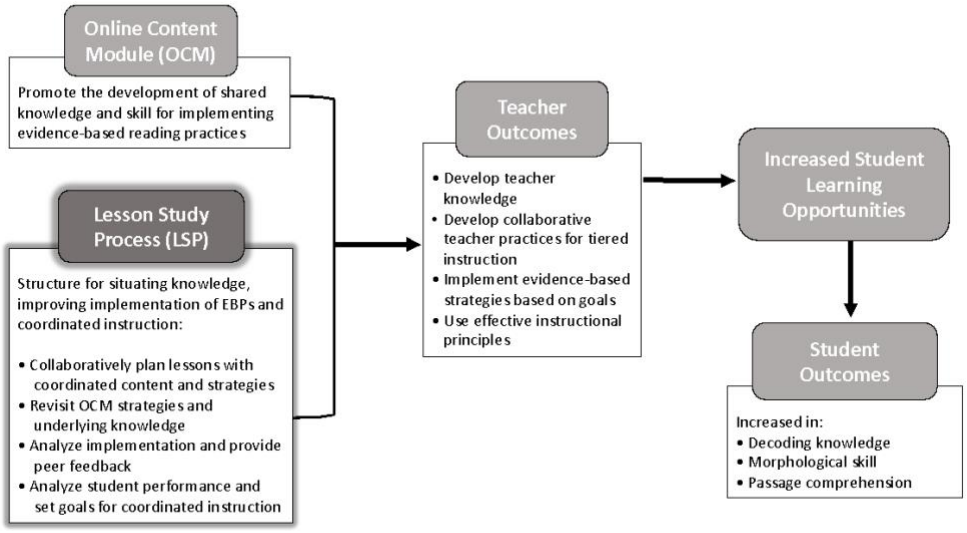
Abstract

We employed a randomized control design to examine the impact of Project Coordinate (PC), a professional development approach incorporating online content modules and lesson study, on twenty-four 4th grade general and special education teachers' knowledge, collaborative planning, and evidence-based instruction in reading. We also examined impact on students' reading skills. Findings from single level models showed moderate to large positive effects for teacher knowledge, and most aspects of their collaborative practice. Cross classified models showed moderate to large effects for teachers' use of evidence-based practices and effective instructional principles (e.g., explicit systematic instruction). Findings of multilevel models showed more muted, positive effects for students' morphological problem solving and multisyllabic decoding, but not for reading comprehension. We discussed implications for future research and practice.

Background/Rationale

Constructivist and situated learning perspectives on teacher learning and research on effective PD (Dede et al., 2009; Hill & Papay, 2022) and team learning (Salas et al., 2018) informed PC's design, as did the input of 14 teachers (7 White, 7 Black) who implemented PC previously in urban schools and found it to be a supportive learning experience for them and their students. PC is comprised of two components: online content modules (OCMs) and a lesson study process (LSP). Five OCMs using multimedia presentations, including videos of instructional practices to highlight evidence-based practices (EBPs) that have been shown to increase the achievement of students with RD and English Language Learners (e.g., O'Connor, 2007; Stevens et al., 2020) in multi-syllabic decoding, morphological awareness and text summarizations. We also included interactive activities to help teachers construct understandings of the EBPs, how to implement EBPs effectively (e.g., using the principles of explicit systematic instruction) in ways that were responsive to students, and content knowledge underpinning these practices. The lesson study process (LSP) was supported by research on effective PD, and research on team learning (e.g., Salas et al., 2018). The LSP followed the completion of individual OCMs and was designed to assist teachers in implementing the knowledge acquired in the OCMs to develop shared knowledge and support collaborative planning and analysis of their instruction at each tier. We hypothesized that the LSP process would increase teachers' knowledge, effective use of EBPs, and their collaborative practice, and in turn, these changes would result in improved student achievement (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Theory of Action Undergirding the PC Intervention*



Key Session Takeaways

Twenty-four 4th grade teams of general and special education teachers were assigned randomly to the PC intervention and a control group. Teacher and student data were analyzed using single level, cross-classified, and multi-level models.

Teacher Outcomes

PC had moderate to large effects on teacher outcomes important for successful MTSS implementation, including: (1) teacher knowledge, (2) different aspects of collaborative practice (e.g., approach to teamwork, understanding of how to plan instruction for students with reading challenges, usefulness of collaborative planning), (3) teachers' use of evidence-based practices (e.g., a multi-syllabic decoding strategy, a text summarization strategy), and (4) teachers use of effective instructional principles (e.g., explicit instruction).

Student Outcomes

PC had positive, but more muted effects on two assessments of reading achievement: morphological problem-solving and multi-syllabic. Effects were small to moderate, but similar to effects derived from other studies of professional development interventions.

Conclusion

Results of our study strengthen those of an earlier study (Benedict et al., 2024) and provide further evidence that the PC intervention holds promise for improving teacher outcomes important to implementing effective MTSS reading instruction and improving student outcomes.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER KNOWLEDGE: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR AND MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Abstract

This dissertation examines the effectiveness of a professional development program designed to help early childhood education (ECE) teachers distinguish between developmentally appropriate and maladaptive behaviors in young children. Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, the study included pre- and post-intervention surveys, a focus group, and four asynchronous learning modules. Pre-service teachers from a large urban university participated, showing slight improvements in their knowledge and application of behavior identification strategies. The professional development content, based on Wakschlag et al.'s work on behavior dimensions, incorporated Content Acquisition Podcasts (CAPs) as a key learning tool. Findings highlight the potential of CAPs and structured training to enhance teacher preparedness for early intervention, reducing negative outcomes linked to maladaptive behaviors. The study underscores the need for ongoing support and professional development in behavior management and provides a foundation for future research in ECE teacher training.

Background/Rationale

Several studies highlight the gap in teacher knowledge regarding the distinction between developmentally appropriate and maladaptive behaviors (Wakschlag et al., 2005; Wakschlag et al., 2010; Whitney, 2018; Yoder & Williford, 2019; Yumus & Bayhan, 2016), affecting their use of evidence-based strategies to prevent challenging behaviors. Teachers' perceptions influence how they identify, address, and understand behaviors in early childhood (Yumus & Bayhan, 2016). Limited research examines a continuum of behaviors to guide educators in identifying maladaptive behaviors or determining when intervention is needed (Dunlap et al., 2006; Wakschlag et al., 2005, 2012; Yumus & Bayhan, 2016). This study aimed to teach early childhood teachers to operationalize behaviors using Wakschlag’s developmental framework and behavior dimensions model, adapted for a prosocial focus, and explored how pre-service teachers' perceptions change after professional development.

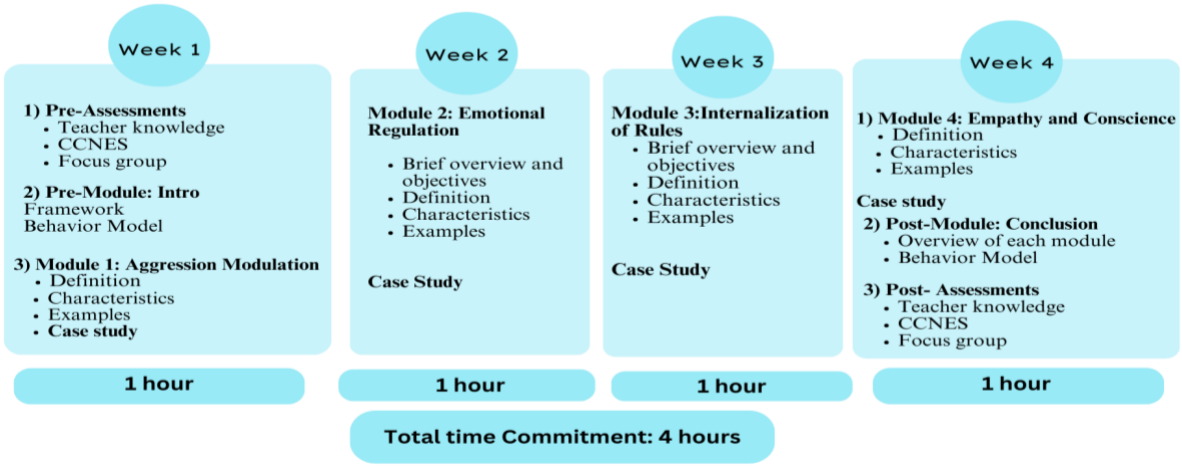
Key Session Takeaways

The study revealed several key findings. Quantitative data from pre- (M =14.00) to post-intervention (M=14.36) Teacher Knowledge of Behavior surveys indicate slight but notable gains in teacher knowledge and confidence. Qualitative findings from focus groups further support these outcomes, highlighting increased confidence in managing challenging behaviors and improved clarity in distinguishing between developmentally appropriate and maladaptive behaviors. Additionally, participants were beginning to incorporate the language and strategies discussed in the modules related to observing behavioral characteristics as well as considering the context of behaviors. A paired-samples t-test examined differences in pre- and post-intervention scores for each Coping with Children' Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES) subscale. Five of the six subscales showed no statistical significance, but the Distress Reactions (DR) subscale revealed a significant decrease in teacher distress from pre-intervention (M=2.78, SD=1.89) to post-intervention (M=2.27, SD=1.70), $t(27) = -3.45$, $p = 0.0019$. This indicates reduced teacher distress after the intervention.

Teachers reported the professional development modules, particularly the use of Content Acquisition Podcasts (CAPs), as useful for applying practical strategies in classroom settings. However, the findings underscore the need for additional, ongoing support to solidify teachers' ability to make accurate behavioral assessments and implement effective management strategies consistently. The results emphasize the value of structured, targeted training programs while pointing to areas for future research and professional development to further enhance teacher efficacy in behavior management. Continuous professional development is essential for helping teachers distinguish between developmentally appropriate and maladaptive behaviors. Training programs should emphasize practical strategies that can be consistently applied in the classroom.

Figure 1 outlines the implementation of the professional development modules based on Kennedy's (2016) Content Acquisition Podcast (CAP) framework.

Figure 1. *Professional Development Modules Outline*



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CO-TEACHING IN A K12 DIGITAL WORLD

Abstract

Virtual and online schools for students from kindergarten through eighth grade are becoming increasingly popular, catering to a diverse range of student populations, including those with disabilities. In response, online schools are exploring inclusive instructional practices, such as co-teaching. This case study aims to gain insight into the implementation of the co-teaching model in an online K-12 setting. Co-teaching is defined as the collaboration of two or more teachers who share educational goals for a single classroom or group of students. Over the course of this yearlong study, several key themes emerged: the need for ongoing professional development, universal benefits for all students, and a redefinition of the concept of the least restrictive environment within the online classroom. Implications and scholarly significance were discussed.

Background/Rationale

Co-teaching implementation faced challenges. Some teachers were required to participate, while others had the option, leading to a lack of cohesiveness. Special education teachers were more firmly expected to engage, while elementary teachers were initially mandated but later allowed to opt out. Those who voluntarily chose to participate demonstrated higher commitment. Training was minimal, often limited to a handout or brief staff discussion, leaving teachers feeling unprepared. The Director of Special Education later noted that an entire year of preparation would have been more effective than the few weeks they had.

Special education teachers contributed a broad understanding of diverse learning needs, influencing general education teachers to adopt more flexible instructional approaches. For instance, in a synchronous math lesson, the special education teacher prompted questions in the chat, enabling the general education teacher to clarify points, benefiting all students.

In the virtual setting, the least restrictive environment became more adaptable. Virtual Academy allowed students to switch between different instructional levels with ease, offering more flexible support. Students could join synchronous classes tailored to their needs, such as pre-teaching sessions before full class instruction or re-teaching classes afterward. This flexibility allowed personalized support, with students participating in additional sessions based on their understanding.

The study underscores the benefits of co-teaching for all students, facilitated by the flexibility of virtual classrooms. Continued research into inclusive online practices for K-12 special education is essential to improve educational outcomes in virtual settings, supporting the diverse needs of students in this rapidly growing educational landscape.

Key Session Takeaways

In a yearlong study on co-teaching in online classrooms, key themes emerged: the need for ongoing professional development, benefits for all students, and a redefined approach to the least restrictive environment.

Implementation Challenges

Co-teaching implementation faced challenges due to inconsistent expectations and insufficient training. Some teachers were required to participate, while others had the option, leading to a lack of cohesiveness. Special education teachers were more firmly expected to engage, while elementary teachers were initially mandated but later allowed to opt out. Those who voluntarily chose to participate demonstrated higher commitment. Training was minimal, often limited to a handout or brief staff discussion, leaving teachers feeling unprepared. The Director of Special Education later noted that an entire year of preparation would have been more effective than the few weeks they had.

Inclusive Benefits

Special education teachers contributed a broad understanding of diverse learning needs, influencing general education teachers to adopt more flexible instructional approaches. For instance, in a synchronous math lesson, the special education teacher prompted questions in the chat, enabling the general education teacher to clarify points, benefiting all students. This collaborative approach enhanced overall teaching satisfaction and inclusiveness.

Redefining the Least Restrictive Environment

In the virtual setting, the least restrictive environment became more adaptable. Virtual Academy allowed students to switch between different instructional levels with ease, offering more flexible support. Students could join synchronous classes tailored to their needs, such as pre-teaching sessions before full class instruction or re-teaching classes afterward. This flexibility allowed personalized support, with students participating in additional sessions based on their understanding.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings highlight the need for clear planning and professional development for co-teaching in virtual environments. Engaging administrators in the co-teaching process is crucial for supporting teachers effectively. The study underscores the benefits of co-teaching for all students, facilitated by the flexibility of virtual classrooms. Continued research into inclusive online practices for K-12 special education is essential to improve educational outcomes in virtual settings, supporting the diverse needs of students in this rapidly growing educational landscape.

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IMPLEMENTING OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER) IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Abstract

This presentation explored the integration of Open Educational Resources (OER) within teacher preparation programs. Focusing on the benefits of OER for instructors and teacher candidates, we presented an interdisciplinary collaboration model to create themed coursework. A practical example of thematic instruction within special education and psychology programs, emphasizing early childhood development, was discussed. Resources housed in Digital Commons are shared to facilitate similar initiatives at other institutions. Key takeaways included steps for OER development, fostering access and equity, and enhancing student engagement.

Background/Rationale

The initiative emerged from an online community of higher education professors interested in thematic instruction as a framework for coursework. This diverse group shared a common goal of improving undergraduate and graduate education by incorporating real-world connections and popular culture into their curriculum. The collaboration emphasized the accessibility and equity of OER materials, offering cost-effective solutions for students and creating lasting resources for professionals.

A key element of the project was the inclusion of interdisciplinary themes, leveraging media like *Sesame Street* to teach early childhood development concepts. This approach supported critical thinking, enhanced motivation, and made learning more engaging and relevant.

Key Session Takeaways

The session highlighted several practical and research-based insights regarding the integration of Open Educational Resources (OER) and themed instruction into teacher preparation programs. Open Educational Resources provide significant benefits by eliminating financial barriers for students, thereby reducing stress and enhancing academic success. By offering free, high-quality instructional materials, OER ensures that teacher candidates gain permanent access to resources that support their professional growth throughout their careers.

Thematic instruction plays a critical role in fostering meaningful learning experiences. Incorporating thematic media, such as *Sesame Street*, into coursework enhances critical thinking, student engagement, and real-world applications. By addressing topics like diversity, emotional development, and societal issues, this approach resonates with students and makes learning more relevant and impactful. The development process for OER materials emphasizes collaboration among educators, alignment with course objectives, and rigorous reviews by peers and students. These steps ensure the creation of accessible and high-quality content, which is often shared through platforms like Digital Commons to broaden its reach.

Finally, practical implementation of themed coursework requires careful consideration of course logistics, the selection of suitable themes, and the alignment of materials with learning objectives. This adaptable approach not only enriches teacher preparation programs but also fosters interdisciplinary learning opportunities across various educational contexts.

The project also incorporated ongoing research to evaluate the educational value of thematic instruction, gathering data from teacher candidates, psychology students, and faculty feedback. Six steps for creating OER, themed coursework were developed: (1) choose a theme; (2) identify collaborators (optional); (3) consider course logistics and materials; (4) identify course objectives and assignments; (5) identify lectures and topic/sub-themes; and (6) create detailed lesson plans (see below).

Additional Resources

- **General Development**: language, fine/gross motor skills, play, health, death and dying (Farewell Mr. Hooper)
- **Emotions**: emotion regulation/development, social-emotional
- **Identity**: identity development, gender (Dress Me Up Club), race (ABCs of Racial Literacy), culture (A Very Sesame Street Thanksgiving), LGBTQIA+ (Family Day)
- **Academics/Education**: ABCs (Letter of the day), 123s (Number of the day), school behaviors (School for Chickens), STEM (Ramp Racers)
- **Exceptional Children/Special Education**: physical/intellectual disabilities, Autism (inclusion of the muppet Julia)
- **Adaptive Domain**: Self-regulation, attendance to task, impulse control, regulation of sensory responses, activities of daily living (e.g., feeding, dressing, personal hygiene)
- **Societal issues**: homelessness, incarceration, international conflict

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FORGE AHEAD! THERAPY DOGS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELLBEING FOR STUDENTS, FACULTY, & STAFF

Abstract

PK-12th grade school districts are responsible for supporting academic achievement for students, as well as social emotional wellbeing for students, faculty, and staff. One school district is forging ahead to address positive wellbeing and mental health for students, faculty, and staff with a district wide therapy dog program. Paws and Peers is a therapy dog program used in educational spaces to provide wellness support throughout the largest school district in Arizona.

Background/Rationale

The mental health of PK-12th grade students has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Naff et al., 2022). School districts are being asked to identify ways to address the mental health and wellness needs of students, faculty, and staff to foster a positive learning environment. Therapy dogs in educational settings are one way that school districts can address the mental health and wellness needs of students, faculty, and staff, while also promoting academics. Therapy dogs "provide psychological or physiological therapy" and differ from service dogs, because they "are encouraged to interact with a variety of people while they are on-duty including petting the therapy dog" (Alliance of Therapy Dogs, 2022, para. 4).

Human-animal interactions can support students with disabilities and their typically developing peers with learning, reducing stress, and positive interactions (Gee et al., 2017). Dogs in education can stimulate cognition and social emotional health (Abat-Ray, 2021), as well as increase reading abilities for students (Hall et al., 2016). Therapy dogs may also be used with a social emotional intervention to promote social competence and mental health for students (Wintermantel & Grove, 2022). While the benefits of animals in education are present in the literature, there is still a need for more information on this topic (Abat-Ray, 2021; Gee et al., 2017).

Mesa Public Schools is forging ahead to address the mental health and wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff in their PK-12 school district with a district wide therapy dog program, Paws and Peers. "Paws & Peers seeks to meet the social and emotional needs of Mesa Public Schools students and staff. These dogs serve as trusted companions in classrooms, counseling, nurse, or administrative offices for crisis intervention, behavioral de-escalation, or simply to address stress, anxiety and/or isolation" (Mesa Public Schools, 2024, para. 1).

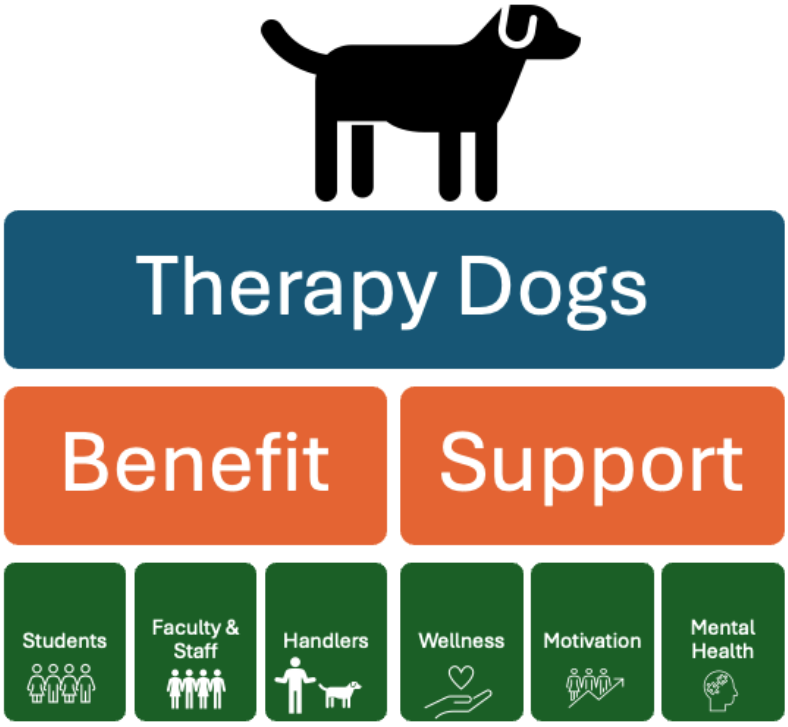
The purpose of this TED session was to provide educators and researchers with information about the benefits of a therapy dog program in PK-12 education and how therapy dogs promote positive wellbeing and mental health for students, faculty, and staff throughout one PK-12 school district.

Key Session Takeaways

The handlers in the Paws and Peers program are district employees, such as general and special education teachers and administrators, and their certified therapy dog/s that pass obedience and therapy dog training. The therapy dogs are present in a variety of educational settings, ranging from general and special education classrooms, to offices, counseling, and administrative spaces, throughout the PK-12 district. Research findings indicate that education stakeholders benefit from therapy dogs in educational settings. In addition, stakeholders identify that the therapy dogs positively impact the wellbeing of students, faculty, staff, and handlers. Examining the impact of therapy dogs in PK-12 education is something that educators and education policy makers need to better understand to inform policies on how mental health and wellness needs of students, faculty, and staff are addressed in PK-12 education.

Figure 1 identifies the people that benefit from therapy dogs and the support that is provided by the therapy dogs in the district.

Figure 1. *Therapy Dog Benefits and Supports*



Therapy dogs in the Paws and Peers program in Mesa Public Schools benefit the students, faculty, staff, and handlers that they interact with in the district in unique and different ways. The therapy dogs support wellness, motivation, and mental health. The Paws and Peers program is one way that Mesa Public Schools is forging ahead to address positive wellbeing and mental health for students, faculty, and staff throughout the PK-12 district.

Additional Resources

- YouTube video from the Maricopa County School Superintendent (2021) to learn more about how therapy dogs support student well-being: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJkoM1IPZH4&t=8s
- Article in the East Valley Tribune (2020) on how therapy dogs bring stress relief to students: https://www.eastvalleytribune.com/news/dogs-bringing-stress-relief-to-mesa-students/article_1f3bb2f8-2e67-11ea-9c47-7b7676d17a5d.html
- A white paper by Pet Partners (2020) on therapy animal interventions: https://petpartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Empirical-Support-for-Therapy-Animal-Interventions.pdf

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN OF LEARNING: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH INCLUSIVE INNOVATION

Abstract

When using different educational technology tools in the classroom, it is important to use a framework when evaluating them for student and teacher use. By using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, we evaluated different artificial intelligence (AI) tools that can be used to support student learning. This session highlighted several AI tools that can be used to support and align to the three UDL principles, "Multiple Means of Engagement, Representation, and Action and expression" (Cast, 2024). Participants learned about these AI tools but also explore practical strategies for integrating them, such as Diffit, Padlet, and Magic School, to support UDL-aligned instruction. Additionally, this session examined both the benefits (e.g., saving time, personalizing learning) and challenges (e.g., addressing bias, ensuring accuracy) of AI in education, providing actionable takeaways to implement immediately.

Background/Rationale

The growing number of AI technologies presents educators with a valuable opportunity to enhance their teaching practices while aligning to the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). According to the guidelines from CAST, UDL emphasizes the importance of offering learners flexible choices for engagement, representation, and expression (CAST, 2024). By integrating these principles with AI tools, educators can create more personalized and inclusive classrooms.

Diffit (2024) is a user-friendly tool that aligns with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework by adjusting reading levels and translating content. These features support the Representation UDL guideline, particularly in terms of language and symbols. Additionally, Diffit provides teachers with the ability to create various graphic organizers, allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways. This feature aligns with the Action and Expression guidelines, specifically supporting expression and communication.

Magic School (2024) provides a variety of bots that supports teachers in creating content and learning activities for students. One bot that aligns with the UDL framework is the UDL choice board. This board enables teachers to create a list of activities for students to choose from to demonstrate their understanding of a specific topic. This adaptability directly corresponds with

the Action and Expression guideline of the UDL framework. In addition, it aligns to the welcome and interest components under the Engagement guideline.

Lastly, Padlet (2024) is a time-saving tool for teachers, featuring AI recipes that facilitate the quick creation of lesson plans, class activities, and rubrics. One AI recipe that aligns with the UDL framework is the discussion board option, which adheres to the Action and Expression guideline. With this feature teachers can use the AI prompts to create a discussion post to engage them in communication and collaboration.

Key Session Takeaways

1. **Understanding AI and UDL:** AI refers to computers capable of performing tasks traditionally requiring human intelligence, such as decision-making and problem-solving (Fitzpatrick, Fox, Weinstein, 2023). UDL provides a framework for designing inclusive learning environments through:
    - Multiple Means of Engagement: Supporting students' interest and motivation in the classroom.
    - Multiple Means of Representation: Providing diverse ways of presenting information to students through multimedia, translation, and modifying content.
    - Multiple Means of Action & Expression: Offering various ways for students to demonstrate their learning or show what they know differently.
2. **Practical AI Tools for UDL:**
    - Diffit: Generates differentiated materials for diverse learner needs.
    - Padlet: Facilitates collaborative learning and representation of ideas.
    - Magic School: Supports ways to have students show what they know differently.
2. **Benefits of AI in Education:**
    - Saves educators' time by automating repetitive tasks.
    - Personalizes learning experiences to meet individual needs.
    - Differentiates instruction effectively to support diverse learners.
2. **Challenges of AI in Education:**
    - Biases in data.
    - Risk of misinformation (AI hallucinations).
    - Ethical considerations

Additional Resources

- CAST UDL Guidelines: https://udlguidelines.cast.org
- Padlet Tips and Tricks: Enhancing Collaboration in Your Classroom - https://www.sfecich.com/post/padlet-tips-and-tricks-enhancing-collaboration-in-your-classroom
- Differentiation made easy with Diffit - https://www.sfecich.com/post/differentiation-made-easy-exploring-the-benefits-of-diffit
- https://app.diffit.me/
- https://www.magicschool.ai/
- https://padlet.com/

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FORGE INNOVATIONS IN SUPPORTING TEACHERS TO LOWER STRESS, IMPROVE COPING, AND PREVENT BURNOUT

Abstract

Well-trained and effective teachers are critical for student success, yet schools across the country face shortages in qualified personnel. One related factor is teacher burnout and attrition, often resulting from high levels of stress and difficulty coping. We used data from the 2022 Learn Together Surveys to explore teachers' rating of their stress, success coping, and satisfaction with teaching as a career. We also examined whether those ratings are associated with teachers' roles and school environments. Teachers reported high levels of stress and moderate coping and satisfaction. Higher principal support, program continuity, and curriculum consistency were associated with higher coping and satisfaction and lower stress. Higher rates of classroom disruption were associated with lower coping and satisfaction and more stress. Results indicate that principal support and a high degree of coordination across curriculum and programs may be effective in producing less stressful and more satisfactory environments for teachers.

Background/Rationale

Access to well-trained and effective teachers is important for student achievement and well-being (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Due to a national teacher shortage, schools across the country are facing a crisis in the lack of available, qualified teachers. One factor in these shortages is teacher attrition, a problem that stems in part from high rates of stress and burnout among teachers (Nguyen & Kremer, 2022). There is evidence that teachers in particular roles, such as special education teachers, face unique stressors that may lead to increased rates of burnout (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Herman et al., 2023). Factors within a school can also serve to lower stress and boost coping (Maslach, 2003) as well as satisfaction with teaching and intent to continue in the field (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). These findings suggest that there are contextual factors that may be changed to improve teacher working conditions and the retention of teachers within the field. Prior research indicates that these include strong principal support, coordination of initiatives across the school, and effective behavior support systems. The purpose of this TED session was to present results from a research study investigating teachers' ratings of their stress, coping, and satisfaction with teaching, and whether contextual factors were associated with those ratings.

Key Session Takeaways

Stress, Coping, and Satisfaction

Overall, teachers reported high levels of stress, a finding that is in line with previous research and supports the hypothesis that finding ways to lower teacher stress is a pressing issue in the field of education. Respondents reported moderate levels of coping with their stress and moderate satisfaction with teaching as a career, suggesting that coping levels are out of line with the amount of stress teachers experience, and that that stress may be driving limited satisfaction with their careers.

Moderators of Teachers' Experience

There were no statistically significant differences between the reported stress levels of general education teachers (GETs) and special education teachers (SETs), though on average GETs reported lower levels of stress and higher coping and satisfaction that SETs; there was a significant difference between the ratings of SETs and GETs working with the support of a co-teacher.

Higher levels of coping and satisfaction and lower levels of stress were associated with higher levels of program continuity, curriculum consistency, and stronger principal support. These findings are in line with prior research. These results support thoughtful and infrequent adoption of new initiatives, coupled with high levels of support for teachers in adapting to those initiatives and commitment to seeing them through. Coordination of teachers across grade levels and subject areas may also support lower stress and higher coping and satisfaction. Generally, supportive principals are predictive of satisfied teachers.

Teachers who reported higher levels of classroom disruption were more likely to report higher stress and lower levels of coping and satisfaction. These results suggest that robust training related to behavior management and effective school-wide systems of positive behavior support may lead to lower stress and greater satisfaction for teachers.

Teachers with fewer than 10 years of experience reported lower coping and satisfaction than their more experienced peers, suggesting that these teachers may need additional support and are at particular risk of leaving the field.

SETs who indicated that they had access to ample information and resources for working with students with disabilities (SWD) were more likely to report lower levels of stress, suggesting that information sharing, collaboration, and robust support for SETs may be effective in improving working conditions.

Interestingly, the percent of SWD and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch at a teacher's school was not meaningfully associated with reported stress, coping, or satisfaction. This lack of an association rebuts the findings of many studies that these factors are associated with greater stress and burnout for teachers.

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FORGE AHEAD: A COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE BETWEEN GENERAL & SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE FOR PRESERVICE TEACHERS APPLYING THEORY TO PRACTICE

Abstract

Faculty from general and special teacher preparation programs collaborated to create a lesson plan template integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles (CAST, 2024) and differentiated instruction. This session shared our process, discussed professional development initiatives, and engaged attendees in interactive dialogue on supporting pre-service teachers in applying theory through practical lesson planning.

Background/Rationale

Teacher education programs play a crucial role in promoting quality teaching and driving educational change (Kant, 2012). Collaborative efforts fostering the development of a common language between general and special education programs are essential for enhancing preservice teachers' readiness and competencies to teach students with diverse needs (Ansari & Fingon, 2017; Fogle & Stark, 2023; Frey et al., 2012; Pugach & Blanton, 2009; Whinnery et al., 2020). This common language enhances rich dialogue among the faculty regardless of their disciplinary expertise, reduces possible miscommunication, and systematically infuses inclusive practices such as UDL throughout the programs (Whinnery et al., 2020). It is essential for teacher education programs to embed a unifying conceptual and practical framework that preservice teachers can effectively implement in their teaching by building a shared community of practice among faculty (Fogle & Stark, 2023; Pugach et al., 2011; Whinnery et al., 2020). The infusion of UDL into teacher education programs improves preservice teachers' selection of strategies to promote engagement and learning for students with diverse needs in lesson planning (Frey et al., 2012; Kahn et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2012). However, it is not an easy or intuitive task, and preservice teachers require training in lesson planning to effectively integrate such practices (Whinnery et al., 2020).

Key Session Takeaways

In our teacher education programs, general and special education faculty worked together to develop a new lesson plan format that embedded UDL principles and various levels of differentiation from the beginning of the lesson planning process. We are aware that lesson planning looks different for preservice and inservice teachers. For preservice teachers, rigorous lesson planning is a critical process to improve the effectiveness of their teaching practices (Morris & Hiebert, 2011; Scott et al., 2022). This session highlighted the process undertaken by faculty within general and special education teacher preparation programs to collaboratively develop a lesson plan template that integrated UDL principles and differentiated instruction. The format of the template was discussed within the context of the following: logical sequence of skills, appropriate accommodations, including guided and supported practice, flexible grouping, measurable goals, and assessment strategies. Furthermore, professional development initiatives used to train faculty and clinical supervisors on the use of the template were discussed. Session participants received the lesson plan template, its corresponding glossary of terms and an exemplar lesson plan. The session concluded with interactive dialogue about ways for attendees to initiate similar collaboration between general and special education faculty in their own teacher preparation programs.

Additional Resources

- Lesson Plan Template and Glossary https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pbbebZnNNSuvR4FvWiQXH-sFQWTcglHC/view?usp=sharing

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CW-FIT: AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION FOR ALL TEACHERS

Abstract

It is necessary to ensure teachers have efficient and effective classroom management tools to improve both student and teacher outcomes. CW-FIT is one evidence-based group contingency that helps increase student engagement and on-task behaviors using regularly available materials and minimal teacher time. In this presentation, we discussed the importance of classroom management, a meta-analysis of CW-FIT, and the cost-effectiveness of the intervention.

Background/Rationale

Teachers consistently list student behaviors among the top reasons for leaving their jobs (Ingersoll et al., 2019). One way educators can directly impact student behavior is through classroom management, which we know promotes instructional engagement and, in turn, academic achievement (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Teachers' use of effective classroom management is especially critical for students, as those in well-managed classrooms have better behavioral and academic outcomes (Gage et al., 2018; Korpershoek et al., 2016; Oliver et al., 2011). Further, when teachers use evidence-based classroom management skills, they report higher job satisfaction and lower burnout (Aloe et al., 2014; Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Group contingencies are one effective classroom management strategy teachers can use to help improve classroom behaviors (Little et al., 2015; Maggin et al., 2012) by setting up a common expectation and goal that students work towards. Group contingencies are particularly effective in large group settings as enable educators to apply behavior principles to many students at once while making use of peer group influence to help shape appropriate behaviors. Further, group contingencies are generally low-resource interventions.

CW-FIT is one group contingency intervention used to shape appropriate classroom behaviors through specific praise, effective feedback, and team-based rewards for engaging in expected behaviors that has been shown to be help increase student academic engagement and decrease disruptive behaviors across a variety of populations and settings (e.g., Wills et al., 2010; Kamps et al., 2015). The purpose of this TED session was to review the value of group contingency classroom management interventions, introduce and review the evidence base of CW-FIT, and discuss the cost-effectiveness of implementing CW-FIT in the classroom.

Key Session Takeaways

To evaluate the effectiveness of CW-FIT, we used systematic review and meta-analysis methods and procedures aligned with current recommendations (e.g., Cooper et al., 2009). We searched all available databases using the following terms: CW-FIT, classwide function-related intervention teams. When reviewing studies for inclusion, limitations were placed on written language of the study (i.e., English), intervention (i.e., CW-FIT), and research design (i.e., an empirical study). The team conducted title and abstract screening, full-text screening, and data extraction for both the systematic review and meta-analysis.

The systematic review yielded 31 individual studies. Thirty studies were conducted in the United States and one was conducted in Ireland. Nine studies were dissertations, with seven later published in peer-reviewed journals. The majority of studies (k=20) were conducted in elementary settings, followed by middle school (k=6). Studies were mostly conducted in general education classrooms (k=20) and were primarily single-case design (k=23). Most studies (k=27) also reported using a social validity measure to determine teacher and/or student acceptability. Group and single-case effect sizes were combined for the meta-analysis using design-comparable effect sizes, and results by outcome were as follows: student on-task behaviors g=1.91 (SE=0.16, p<.001); student disruptive behaviors g=-2.01 (SE=0.67, p<.05); teacher g=1.50 (SE=0.27, p<.001); and teacher reprimands g=-0.71 (SE=0.14, p<.01). Results by outcome unit were as follows: target students g=1.11 (SE=0.21, p<.001); classwide g=2.24 (SE=0.21, p<.001); teachers g=1.30 (SE=0.17, p<.001). For models combining effect sizes across behaviors, the directionality of disruptions and reprimands were recoded such that a positive effect size represented a therapeutic directional change in the outcome.

Additionally, economic evaluation methods were used to calculate the total implementation costs for two CW-FIT implementation models: train the trainer (i.e., CW-FIT trainers trained district coaches to implement CW-FIT, coaches then went on to train and coach teachers) and micro-credential (i.e., district coaches and teachers asynchronously completed online modules to learn how to implement CW-FIT, coaches provided feedback to teachers). For both models, total implementation costs were estimated using national average prices obtained from the Cost Out tool (CBCSE, 2020) along with pilot data collected during a randomized control trail conducted across five school districts in three states (train the trainer) and a pilot implementation of CW-FIT in rural schools in seven states (micro-credential). Data were collected and analyzed at the district level, then aggregated across districts to estimate an average cost per student.

The total cost per student of the CW-FIT train the trainer model was $56.08. This included 8.5 hours for district coaches and 2 hours for teachers to learn how to implement CW-FIT (training costs) and 6 minutes per session. These costs also included 1.5 hours of coaching provided over 4-6 weeks and teleconferencing costs to allow for self-recording and implementation monitoring. Implementation and coaching costs were the same across models. Training costs for the micro-credential model were 1.75 hours for both teachers and coaches. The lower training costs associated with the micro-credential model resulted in a much lower per student cost of $28.37. Taken together, CW-FIT is one highly effective and cost-efficient classroom management intervention that requires minimal additional resources or training for teachers to implement in their classrooms as a means to improve student and teacher behavioral outcomes.

Additional Resources

- CW-FIT website: cwfit.ku.edu

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EMBEDDING POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL PRACTICES INTO THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM TO STRENGTHEN PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITIONS FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

Abstract

This session focused on how to embed evidence-based behavioral supports in the preservice teacher college classroom. Specifically, how to leverage teaching clear expectations, providing feedback and opportunities to respond, as well as experiences using a group contingency and token economy, all to strengthen key professional dispositions aligned to accreditation.

Background/Rationale

Modeling and teaching education majors evidence-based practices in behavior supports is a crucial component to any teacher preparation program. Coursework in these programs should combine with practical field experiences to introduce, practice, and apply skills needed to become an effective teacher. Furthermore, accreditation of teacher programs often comes with the requirement to evaluate essential professional dispositions of the field (e.g., regular attendance, prompt assignment submission, professional communication, self-directed learning, exhibiting respect). Use of promising classroom behavior practices can translate to the college classroom to ultimately strengthen these competencies.

Key Session Takeaways

Evidence-based behavioral principles shown to be effective in K-12 schools can be embedded into the college classroom. These practices include offering abundant choice (e.g., writing prompts, type of project, whom to work with or to work alone), timely feedback (quick grading turnaround), and descriptive praise to increase skills and maintain motivation (Barton et al., 2018; Horner & Sugai, 2016). Such praise, along with varied opportunities to respond, are also applied to class meetings during whole and small group discussion to maintain student engagement and comfort with participation (Armendariz & Umbreit, 1999; Demchak et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2019; Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports [PBIS], 2024). Furthermore, including a range of complexity in activities according to Bloom's Taxonomy applies to the college classroom (Airasian et al., 2001; Bloom, 1956). Strategic presentation of complex tasks as well as lesson pacing/length increases engagement and decreases frustration and fatigue (What Works Clearinghouse, 2008). Varying both discussion format and assignment complexity within and between class meetings ensures a dynamic experience while considering different learning preferences.

The special education faculty at the University of Maine, Farmington were seeking improvement with student adherence to the five professional dispositions within the Teacher Education Unit. We decided to explicitly teach these expectations in each of our courses by breaking down what

each looks like and having students practice them, receive feedback, and reinforcement (Chaparro et al., 2015; PBIS, 2024). An opportunity to integrate instruction about PBIS with this initiative was in the required course on positive behavior supports for the major at our university. Along with instruction on group contingencies and token economies (Chow et al., 2016; ibestt Project, 2017, Kim et al., 2022), students participated in a real-time simulation. The class worked as a whole group to earn points by practicing behaviors aligned to the five professional dispositions within the Teacher Education Unit at UMF. Each student could then choose a reward from a menu aligned to the PALPATES (Privileges, Attention, Leadership, Praise, Assistance, Touch, Escape, Supplies) model of reinforcement (Riffel and Eggleston, 2016), tailored age-appropriately to college students. Our goal was participation in such a system to both build the skills needed to implement positive behavior systems, while practicing and receiving reinforcement for UMF's professional dispositions expected of effective teachers.

Sample College Course Rewards Menu Aligned to the PALPATES Model

Privileges	Choose a day for the class to listen to your choice of songs OR publicly interview Dr. G-any 10 questions that she HAS to answer
Attention	Slideshow of your pets and/or hobbies shown to the whole class OR one-on-one coffee with Dr. G
Leadership	Design and lead a 20-minute discussion for one week's topic
Praise	Positive email from Dr. G to your parents OR advisor and professors
Assistance	5 extra points on any assignment of your choosing
Touch	Chair cushion OR sensory fidget for remaining meetings (Dr. G will provide)
Escape	24-hour extension on any assignment
Supplies	$5 Dunkin card

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FORGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES THROUGH COLLABORATIVE UNIFIED SPORTS: A PARTNERSHIP GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Abstract

Unified Sports (UnS) programs foster inclusion by creating team sports opportunities for students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). In partnership with Special Olympics, these programs bring students together on equal footing, enhancing social connections, skill development, and community support. This session provided a step-by-step guide for implementing a UnS program in schools, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, student feedback, inclusive practices, and celebration of achievements. Key action steps and resources were outlined to equip schools with tools to create meaningful, inclusive sports experiences promoting a positive school culture and foster a sense of belonging among students.

Background/Rationale

Peer relationships are vital for the social and emotional growth of all students, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Inclusive interactions allow students to build social skills, gain support, develop camaraderie, and broaden perspectives (Ziegler et al., 2020; Biggs & Carter, 2017). However, students with significant disabilities often experience limited social engagement, interacting primarily with adults rather than peers, which can lead to social isolation and dependence on protected environments as they grow older (Lipscomb et al., 2017; Mithen et al., 2015). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) supports inclusive practices, advocating for the involvement of students with IDD in extracurricular activities to foster social connections, self-determination, and post-school success (Agran et al., 2017).

Unified Sports (UnS) programs address these needs by bringing students with and without disabilities together on the same teams, allowing all participants to build skills, connect socially, and engage in meaningful sports experiences (Special Olympics, 2024). Unlike traditional disability awareness programs, which sometimes reinforce stereotypes, UnS emphasizes equal participation, fostering friendship, mutual respect, and a positive school climate (Carter et al., 2010; Grandisson et al., 2019). This inclusive approach enhances students' physical, social, and emotional well-being, benefiting both students with IDD and their peers, and ultimately promotes a more inclusive and supportive school community (McConkey et al., 2013; Siperstein et al., 2017).

Key Session Takeaways

Implementing a Unified Sports program involves several key steps aimed at establishing a supportive, inclusive environment:

1. **Assemble a Support Team**:
   Building a team of committed staff—athletic directors, special education teachers, and coaches—provides a foundation for successful program implementation. Partnering with local or national Special Olympics offices and utilizing resources like the NFHS Coaching Unified Sports course supports this initiative with essential guidance and training materials. Schools can connect with their local Special Olympics office for guidance or utilize online resources such as Special Olympics webinars and the NFHS Coaching Unified Sports course (Special Olympics, 2018; Amaro & Mattson, 2023). A dedicated leader ensures coordination, accountability, and a clear vision for inclusion.

2. **Gather Student Feedback**:
   Understanding students' interests, especially those with IDD, is essential to a successful program. Use surveys and focus groups and adapt communication methods to ensure accessibility. Involving parents and caregivers can provide further insights, ensuring the program is responsive to the needs of all students (Special Olympics, 2023).

3. **Recruit and Educate Neurotypical Partners**:
   Recruiting students without disabilities, such as those from sports teams, leadership classes, or inclusive clubs, enhances program inclusivity. Informational sessions are vital to educating partners about the goals and values of UnS, ensuring a respectful, supportive team culture. Creative outreach strategies like interest meetings and school announcements can encourage participation (Klem & Connell, 2004; Sykes, 2021). The NFHS's student guide offers valuable resources on recruiting and building UnS teams (Special Olympics, 2023).

4. **Conduct Inclusive Practices and Competitions**:
   Ensure that practices are inclusive and regularly scheduled to involve both students with disabilities and neurotypical partners. Flexibility in scheduling, such as during lunch or after school, is crucial to accommodate diverse student schedules (Special Olympics, 2023). Collaborate with school administrators, coaches, and Special Olympics to organize competitions and maintain clear communication with local and state organizations (Amaro & Mattson, 2023).

5. **Celebrate Achievements**:
   Celebrating achievements through school events—sports competitions, rallies, and parades—strengthens the UnS program's impact on school culture. Recognizing all participants promotes inclusivity, encourages school spirit, and reinforces the program's commitment to fostering a positive, supportive environment for all students (Special Olympics, 2023).

Additional Resources

Information Topic	Website	Brief Description
Starting a Program at Your School	NFHS: Starting a Unified Sports Program	Provides a guide on how to start a Unified Sports program in schools, including steps and best practices.
	Special Olympics: Unified Sports	Outlines the goals and structure of Unified Sports and offers resources to schools starting programs.
Unified Sports Program Locator	Special Olympics Program Locator	A tool to find Special Olympics Unified Sports programs by location, helping schools connect to local chapters.
A Student's Guide to Unified Sports	Unified Sports: A Student's Guide	A downloadable guide designed for students, explaining the rules, benefits, and structure of Unified Sports.
Coaching Unified Sports	NFHS Learn: Coaching Unified Sports	An online training course for coaches, covering strategies for coaching inclusive teams and understanding disabilities.
General Resources and Tools for Unified Sports	Special Olympics Unified Sports Tools & Docs	Provides various resources, including guides, documents, and tools to help develop and maintain Unified Sports programs.

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UDL 3.0 AND TEACHER EDUCATION: OPPORTUNITY OR OBSTACLE?

Abstract

In this session attendees explored readiness for UDL 3.0 implementation with educators. They gained insights from contrasting teacher education programs on early experiences. They also discovered the nuanced perspectives—confusion, frustration, inspiration, and aspiration—that shape UDL 3.0 integration. Participants equipped themselves with valuable lessons to enhance UDL application in their teaching practice.

Background/Rationale

As the landscape of education continues to evolve, teacher preparation programs must adapt to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a robust framework that can guide these adaptations, ensuring that future educators are equipped to support learners with varied backgrounds, abilities, and experiences. UDL prioritizes accessibility, inclusivity, and equity, making it a crucial component of modern teacher education.

UDL 3.0, launched in the summer of 2024 by CAST, marks a significant milestone in the evolution of inclusive education. This update reflects years of research and development, enhancing the framework to better address contemporary learning challenges. As classrooms become more diverse, UDL 3.0 offers a comprehensive approach to designing curricula that accommodate learner variability. Teacher education programs must integrate these new guidelines to prepare educators who can create inclusive and effective learning environments.

In this context, two teacher educators—one working with undergraduate pre-service teachers and the other with in-service graduate educators—have examined how UDL 3.0 influences instructional practices. Their insights provide valuable perspectives on how teacher education programs can effectively transition to this updated framework. Through an analysis of student perspectives on UDL 3.0, they have identified key challenges and opportunities for integrating these guidelines into teaching practices. The findings contribute to the development of Open Educational Resources (OER) that support educators in implementing UDL 3.0 effectively. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and engagement, UDL 3.0 ensures that all learners have access to rigorous and meaningful education. The framework enables educators to think beyond traditional teaching methods, proactively designing curriculum and instructional strategies that embrace diversity, enhance learning experiences, and support equitable educational outcomes.

Key Session Takeaways

- UDL 3.0 represents a transformative step in inclusive education, incorporating significant advancements that address the evolving needs of diverse learners. By focusing on accessibility, flexibility, and inclusivity, the updated guidelines equip educators with strategies to foster engagement and remove learning barriers.
- The integration of UDL 3.0 into teacher preparation programs is essential for equipping future educators with the tools necessary to design instruction that is responsive to student variability.
- The inclusion of UDL in key national policies such as ESSA and the National Education Technology Plan further emphasizes its importance in shaping contemporary education practices. These policies reinforce the necessity of implementing UDL in teacher education to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities for all students, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds.
- Teacher candidates must develop the skills necessary to implement UDL effectively within diverse classrooms. This involves cultivating an inclusive mindset and proactively designing curricula that support a wide range of learning needs.
- Understanding student perspectives on UDL 3.0 plays a crucial role in identifying challenges and opportunities in its implementation. Analysis of pre-service and in-service educators' reflections revealed areas where the new guidelines enhance their understanding of inclusive practices while also highlighting certain complexities that necessitate further support and professional development.
- The research findings led to the creation of Open Educational Resources (OER) designed to support educators in effectively integrating UDL 3.0 into their instructional strategies. These resources offer practical guidance, ensuring that both pre-service and in-service teachers can apply the framework within various educational settings.
- UDL 3.0 is not limited to large-scale institutional adoption but can be implemented in individual courses by dedicated professors. The flexibility of the framework allows for both systemic and small-scale transformations, ensuring that inclusive teaching practices can be embedded at all levels of higher education.
- This presentation was designed to showcase how the 3.0 UDL framework and checkpoints influence specific practices in university teacher education settings. By presenting concrete examples, educators in the study gained insight into how to apply UDL 3.0 in their own courses.
- All presentation materials adhere to best practices in accessibility and UDL as defined by the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials (AEM). Ensuring accessibility in materials is an essential part of fostering an inclusive learning environment for all participants.
- The session provided participants with an opportunity to engage with and reflect on UDL 3.0 and its associated resources. Through interactive elements, attendees explored ways to integrate these guidelines into their own teaching practices while also discovering strategies to guide their teacher candidates in using the framework effectively.

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FORGING A PATH INTO REFLECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICE USING VIDEO FEEDBACK

Abstract

Using video-based feedback and analysis to prepare reflective practitioners is a promising practice for teacher educators. In this presentation we shared preliminary research (and procedures) for using video feedback for self-reflection in a formative manner (vs. summative in student teaching or the like). Two SUNY institutions took part in a scaffolded professional development sequence, focusing on (a) incorporating video-based feedback into their courses, and (b) integrating reflective teaching cycles into their instructional repertoires. We discussed specific examples from special education courses and provided input on how to get started in using "technology in the service of pedagogy" to help ensure teacher candidates will develop the reflective and teaching skills that can facilitate continued growth and learning.

Background/Rationale

A promising approach to fostering teacher reflection is video-based feedback (i.e., video analysis), which has been shown to improve teacher knowledge and performance, reflective ability, and K-12 student performance (Morin et al., 2019). Video-based reflection typically involves teachers analyzing videos of their own teaching using a cyclical approach such as record, review, reflect, and revise (Nagro, 2020; Nagro et al., 2019; Reichenberg, 2020). Too often, however, the use of video in teaching performance has been used as a summative evaluation of teaching ability or as a method to "watch footage of experienced teachers and learn from their advanced skills" (Stice & Gannon, 2023, p.11). It has been used less frequently, thus far, as a formative assessment to improve teacher performance through an iterative reflection process involving teaching, self-reflection, and goal setting (Kaczorowski & Hashey, 2020). Brownell and colleagues (2019) include video analysis in their "continuum of pedagogies" that should be considered when preparing teachers to use High Leverage Practices (HLPs). Through the analysis process, candidates can "… review critical incidents multiple times systematically" (p. 344), which when paired with structured tools as well as instructor feedback to help guide their reflection, powerful changes in practice can be noted.

Key Session Takeaways

1. Reflective ability is a key professional skill that allows teachers to examine and improve upon their own practice.
2. Reflective ability in education refers to teachers' ability to notice important teaching moments, to use their knowledge of evidence-based teaching approaches to analyze and evaluate their decisions, and to set goals and apply insights into their future teaching.
3. A promising approach to fostering teacher reflection is video-based feedback (i.e., video analysis), which has been shown to improve teacher knowledge and performance, reflective ability, and K-12 student performance (Morin et al., 2019).
4. Reflective processes can vary but have similarities (e.g., PD-CASE by Reichenberg, 2020 vs. Reflection Matrix by Nagro et al., 2019).
5. Preparing teacher educators to incorporate video-based feedback into their preparation programs is a feasible practice with a reasonable amount of professional development needed using a variety of video software tools.

Additional Resources

Reflection Matrix Example: Describe, Analyze, Jude, Apply

Focus Items	Describe what happened or detail specific elements of the lesson	Analyze and explain the reasons why you made a teaching decision	Judge the success of specific decision by noticing the effect that decision had on a portion of or the lesson overall	Apply insight from this review to create a plan for extending effective or changing ineffective practices in future lessons
Expectations for Learning Goals for learning are communicated clearly to students. Even if the goals are not conveyed at the outset of a lesson, students are clear about what they have been learning by the end of the lesson.				

(Nagro & deBettencourt, 2019)

PD-CASE Reflection Framework

1 – Perplexity – Choose a moment that is perplexing to you and explain why you chose it.	Something that surprised you, made you curious, made you uneasy, something challenging, something that went well
2 – Describe that moment with at least four details	What were you seeing in students? Hearing from students? Noticing in students? What were you thinking? Doing? No judgement!
3 – Central challenge question	Write a broadly applicable question that could propel your professional growth in this area (rather than focused only on improving this one lesson).
4 – Alternatives	Generate at least 3 alternative approaches to answer your question. Cite professional resources and research to support at least one with an in-text citation.
5 – Select	Select one or a combination of alternatives. Complete both sentences - I will continue to … (1-2 sentences). Next time, I will . . . (2 or more ideas with an in-text citation).
6 – Enact	Tell when you could enact this.

(Reichenberg, 2020)

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PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Abstract

Parents have a choice when deciding which school to send their child to. We prepare teacher candidates to work in all schools, so we surveyed professionals in private schools using the Teachers' Attitude toward Inclusion Scale (TAIS). In this TED session, we shared the results of our study.

Background/Rationale

Partnerships with schools are critical to the success of students with disabilities. While many students with disabilities attend public schools across the United States, there are families who choose a private-school education for their children. Parentally placed private school students with disabilities, including those placed in faith-based schools, are ensured rights under IDEA 2004 (Eigenbrood, 2010; US OSEP, 2022). IDEA 2004 clarified the rights that they are entitled to as private school students, including the provision of flow through Part B federal funds for special education and related services, child find activities, and meaningful consultation between public and private schools. In order for meaningful partnerships to occur between public and private schools, teacher candidates need to know their responsibilities under IDEA 2004, and have the dispositions needed to collaborate in these circumstances.

Little research has been done about inclusion in private, faith-based schools, and this study adds to that research base by providing a glimpse into teacher attitudes toward inclusion in faith-based schools. Most private, Christian schools enroll students with disabilities (Lane, 2017; Taylor, 2005) and the majority of faith-based schools provide some level of special education support for these students, although the extent of these services vary (Bello 2006; Boyle & Hernandez, 2016; Eigenbrood, 2005).

Teacher attitudes and beliefs are powerful and can influence how successfully inclusion is implemented in a school setting. Inclusion is more successful when teachers have a strong personal commitment to it and believe that they have the ability to include children with special education needs (Forlin et al., 2008; Grieve, 2009). Teachers are less willing to include students with behavioral challenges than students with other SENs (Grieve, 2009; Monsen et al. 2014). To our knowledge, our study is the first to use the revised TAIS to survey individuals who work in private, faith-based schools.

Key Session Takeaways

A significant finding of this research revealed that teachers in faith-based private schools are least willing to include students with severe behavioral challenges. This finding dovetailed with previous work from Grieve (2009) and Monsen et al. (2014). Teachers were also less willing to include students categorized as having multiple difficulties and emotional difficulties. Teachers indicated they were most willing to include students with mild speech and language difficulties, giftedness, and mild learning disabilities. As teachers ranked their level of satisfaction with available resources at their schools, on-site mental health supports, including counselors and social workers, significantly stood out as the lowest area. Participants were the most satisfied with their special education or resource room teacher. Finally, the results of this study failed to find a correlation between teachers' years of experience and their willingness to include students with the listed disabilities.

These findings have significant implications for teachers working in faith-based private schools. A key implication is that teachers need additional support and/or professional development in student behavior and emotional challenges. Teachers reported that they were satisfied with their special education teacher, who often handles student academics, but they were the least satisfied with on-site mental health support. This is the type of service that could benefit students with behavioral and emotional challenges, but it is significantly lacking. When faith-based private schools do not feel they can offer the support a child needs, the school may work with the family to decide that another school may be more beneficial to the child's needs (Bratton, 2020). This disrupts the child's education and does not help the teacher include future students with similar challenges. While this may be a challenge for schools outside the scope of this study, more resources, training, and support for teachers working with behavioral and emotional challenges could increase teachers' willingness to include students with these disabilities in faith-based private schools.

This study also demonstrated a need for faith-based private schools to have more on-site mental health support. While teacher professional development and training can help mitigate student challenges and allow schools to take preventative and proactive approaches, some students will still need more individualized support. It is unlikely that a special education teacher has the qualifications to provide this type of support in the way that a counselor or social worker would. As students with behavioral and emotional challenges become more prevalent in every classroom, meeting their needs with only classroom teachers and special educators is difficult. Licensed mental health providers can assist and support in these areas. Partnerships between faith-based private schools, public schools, and community organizations offer the opportunity to explore how these entities could come together to support students. While faith-based private schools may lack resources due to finances and other reasons, collaboration between organizations has been reported as a way to overcome these barriers and support students.

Faith-based private schools are not unique in that these needs of students are prevalent. This study highlighted key areas where teachers in these schools are less likely to include students and what resources could be improved to meet this need.

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PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS: THE HIGH-LEVERAGE PRACTICES IN ACTION IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Abstract

Do special educators at private schools put the HLPs into practice? Research revealed that 13 of the 22 HLPs were used by teachers at most sites, whereas five were rarely used. Collaboration with public schools was also discovered to be important to the success of special education at private schools.

Background/Rationale

Partnerships with schools are critical to the success of students with disabilities. While many students with disabilities attend public schools across the United States, there are families who choose a private-school education for their children. Parentally placed private school students with disabilities, including those placed in faith-based schools, are ensured rights under IDEA 2004 (Eigenbrood, 2010; US OSEP, 2022). IDEA 2004 clarified the rights that they are entitled to as private school students, including the provision of flow through Part B federal funds for special education and related services, child find activities, and meaningful consultation between public and private schools.

Little research has been done about special education practices in private, faith-based schools. Most private, Christian schools enroll students with disabilities (Lane, 2017; Taylor, 2005) and the majority of faith-based schools provide some level of special education support for these students, although the extent of these services vary (Eigenbrood, 2005; Bello 2006; Boyle & Hernandez, 2016).

The high-leverage practices (HLPs) in special education are research-based, known to foster student engagement and learning, and are broadly applicable in a multitude of special education settings. The HLPs "address the most critical practices that every K-12 special education teacher should master" (Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center, 2017, p. 15). While the original intent of CEC's HLP project was to support special education teacher candidates (Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center, 2017), the application to all practicing teachers has evolved as the HLPs have been published and put into use. The HLPs were chosen as the basis for this study because they are "the foundational practices needed for an effective and successful career creating success stories for our nation's students with the most complex learning and behavioral needs (Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center, 2017, p. 4). To the researcher's knowledge, research of this kind has not been done with educators in Lutheran schools. The research also adds to the research base regarding partnerships between public and private schools as mandated by IDEA 2004 (Eigenbrood, 2010; US OSEP, 2022).

Key Session Takeaways

This study was conducted in 14 Lutheran K-8 schools and employed the methods of direct observation and interview research to collect data. Six of the 22 HLPs were observed by teachers at 100% of the sites including five instruction and one social/emotional/behavior practice. An additional two HLPs, one each from the collaboration and assessment components, were used by all teachers as stated in their interviews. Five additional HLPs encompassing all four components were used at 78% or more of the sites, as either stated in the interview or observed directly. Five practices encompassing the areas of assessment, social/emotional/behavioral and instruction were used at 29% or fewer of the sites, although some teachers stated that other educators in their buildings taught social behaviors. Table 1 presents the results from the study.

Table 1. *Percentages of HLPs used by special education teachers in private schools*

High-Leverage Practices	Percent
C1: Collaborate with professionals to increase student success.	100
C2: Organize/facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families.	64
C3: Collaborate with families to support student learning/secure services.	93
A4: Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding.	100
A5: Interpret/communicate assessment information to design/implement programs.	14
A6: Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, make adjustments.	86
S7: Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment.	100
S8:Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' behavior.	93
S9: Teach social behaviors.	29
S10: Conduct FBAs to develop individual student behavior support plans.	21
I11: Identify and prioritize long-and short-term learning goals.	57
I12: Systematically design instruction toward specific learning goals.	57
I13: Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.	86
I14: Teach cognitive/metacognitive strategies to support learning independence.	29
I15:Provide scaffolded supports.	100
I16: Use explicit Instruction.	100
I17: Use flexible grouping.	100
I18: Use strategies to promote active student engagement.	100
I19: Use assistive and instructional technologies.	78
I20: Provide intensive instruction.	64
I21:Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning.	14
I22: Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning.	100

There is evidence that special educators in private, faith-based schools are utilizing a high number of HLPs in their daily instruction. Some practices are performed by someone else, including partner public-school district staff. The importance of collaborating with their partner public-school district was an important factor for those private schools running a successful special education program. This study has implications for private and public school partnerships, and it is a topic that should be addressed in teacher education.

Additional Resources

- ERIC Resource: Children with disabilities placed by their parents in private schools: An IDEA practices toolkit: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480581

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CRAZY AND FUN: MODELING CO-TEACHING IN AN ELA METHODS COURSE

Abstract

This proceeding will focus on the results of a study of co-teaching in a teacher preparation English Language Arts Methods course. An outline and findings of the study on modeling of co-teaching for general elementary education and dual certification teacher candidates are described.

Background/Rationale

The modeling co-teaching for teacher candidates is likely to impact the outcome and desire for new teachers to effectively impact the practice. Morelock et. al. (2017) found that the modeling of co-teaching practices in higher education was underrepresented within the literature, indicating the need for this research. Proving the value of co-teaching in higher education, Hurd and Weilbacher (2017) found that teacher candidates are more likely to be prepared to co-teaching when it is modeled for them. Kelly (2018) also described the benefits for teacher educators in providing more opportunities for collaboration, growth, efficiency, and mentorship between faculty.

Co-teaching in the teacher preparation program can be a model for teacher candidates in their future classrooms. During the spring of 2024, two professors co-taught an English Language Arts (ELA) methods course for elementary and dual certification pre-service teachers. Students were in their second semester of their junior year. A mixed-methods approach was used to gather insights. Data collection included surveys and illustrations, adapted from the work of King-Sears, Brawand, and Johnson (2019). The focus was on understanding the teacher candidates' perceptions and experiences with co-teaching in the ELA course, with additional analysis conducted on the submitted illustrations to further explore the collaborative teaching dynamic.

Key Session Takeaways

Research findings on the positive impact of co-teaching highlight several key benefits, including increased support, boosted confidence, and the introduction of multiple perspectives. The collaborative learning environment created through co-teaching not only enhances student engagement but also fosters improved future teaching practices. The majority of participants reported feeling engaged and motivated due to dynamic interactions between instructors. In a quantitative analysis, 98.3% of respondents found co-teaching helpful, and 97.1% would recommend it for future classes. Additionally, 77.8% of participants rated their motivation levels as a 4 out of 4. The illustrations indicated collaboration between professors, with common themes including team teaching and small group work, further underscoring the collaborative nature of the co-teaching model.

The possible positive impact of co-teaching experience indicates that it enhances student learning by offering dual perspectives, fostering active participation, and providing personalized feedback. Additionally, co-teaching prepares teacher candidates for future collaborative teaching environments. However, there are areas for improvement, such as class sizes to ensure individualized attention and clarifying instructional roles and transitions to minimize confusion. Future research should explore co-teachers' experiences to gain deeper insights, conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of co-teaching, and assess the effectiveness of different co-teaching models across various disciplines. Table 1 outlines the co-teaching process used and implemented by the two ELA professors.

Table 1. *Co-teaching Steps and Tips*

Steps	Tips
Before	
1. Develop a strong co-teaching partnership. 2. Schedule regular planning meetings. 3. Choose co-teaching models collaboratively. 4. Explore current content trends and issues. 5. Co-plan scaffolded activities with tiered complexity. 6. Organize materials & assign teaching roles.	• Establish norms for a respectful partnership. • Share expertise in co-teaching and content. • Align responsibilities with strengths and teaching styles. • Use a shared digital platform for collaboration. • Balance speaking roles equitably.
During	
7. Co-teach the lesson & set expectations. 8. Follow planned speaking roles & transitions. 9. Adapt based on informal assessments. 10. Support students by circulating the room. 11. Evaluate student learning.	• Stay flexible and step in when needed. • Encourage students to engage with both teachers. • Circulate during activities to support students. • Check-in with each other during transitions.
After	
12. Reflect on strengths & areas for growth. 13. Use student feedback to identify improvements.	• Gather informal student feedback on co-teaching. • Debrief together in a shared space. • Reflect individually & discuss. • Apply agreed-upon changes.

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"OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL": AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF AN ACCELERATED PATHWAYS TO LICENSURE PROGRAM FOR PARAEDUCATORS

Abstract

Innovative alternative pathways programs have been identified as one potential solution for the special education teacher shortage. In this session, we discussed the results of a mixed methods case study focused on evaluating an apprenticeship-oriented accelerated licensure program for currently working paraeducators on participant perception of self-efficacy and development.

Background/Rationale

With growing numbers of teacher shortages in special education and parallel declines in enrollment in traditional pre-service preparation (Morgan et al., 2024), it is important to consider Alternative Pathways to Licensure (APL). The development of innovative APLs represents a strategy for diversifying and increasing the pool of potential special education teachers (Sayman et al., 2018). However, there is limited research on the most effective elements within these programs for fostering the knowledge and abilities of future special education teachers to incorporate evidence-based teaching methods (Scheeler et. al., 2016, Szocik et al., 2024). Both research and local evaluations of our programs suggest that special education teachers trained through APLs may lack the necessary skills to effectively implement evidence-based academic interventions for diverse students without proper support and practice in real classroom settings. Additionally, research shows that a considerable number of teachers enrolled in APLs do not finish the program and end up not receiving their teacher certification (Windschitl, 2005), which is in conflict with the intent of these programs to address teacher shortages. Knipe (2016) found that flexibility designed programs were necessary to develop teachers who were able to work in a wide variety of situations based on the ever-changing needs of education in today's society. As a result, Windschitl (2005) suggested that further teacher education program research be geared toward which models of APLs work best in given situations, rather than what type of singular program model is best. Research by Scott (2003) also indicates that APL program variables such as (a) instructor characteristics, (b) teaching methods implemented, (c) classroom environment, and (d) evaluation methods have a greater influence on a high-quality learning experience, although deeper exploration of pathway design on learner outcomes is warranted.

Key Session Takeaways

To address Nevada's special education teacher shortage, faculty partnered with early childhood and elementary education colleagues to create the Paraprofessional Pathway Program (PPP). This accelerated "grow-your-own" program allows paraeducators, support staff, and long-term substitutes to complete an undergraduate program while working in schools. Since 2021, 99 students have enrolled, with 95 (96%) graduating and becoming licensed special education teachers in Nevada.

An embedded mixed methods study was conducted with the first PPP graduating cohort after their first teaching year to assess readiness. The study was guided by the research question, "How well prepared did you feel to implement evidence-based practices for diverse students with disabilities? Why?" Eleven participants were recruited; nine (81.8%) completed a quantitative survey, and four (44.4%) joined a Zoom focus group. The survey, adapted from Mathews (2018), assessed self-efficacy, learning opportunities, program vision, and field support. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

Survey results (Table 1) showed PPP graduates had high self-efficacy, valued the program's vision, and felt supported but noted limited opportunities to learn evidence-based practices. Focus group analysis revealed three themes: (a) continuous mentorship from coursework to induction, (b) reflections on learning high-leverage practices, and (c) the program's structure allowing candidates to work while completing the program.

Table 1. *Initial Results of Embedded Mixed Methods Design*

Quantitative Analysis		**Qualitative Analysis**	
Scale from Quantitative Survey	**Score**	**Thematic Analysis from Focus Groups**	**Quotes**
Self-efficacy	7.90/9.0	Continuum of mentorship and support from teacher preparation to induction	"Induction support from mentor teacher" "Explicit feedback during practicum"
Vision of teaching and learning	3.30/4.0	Learning of high-leverage, critical pedagogies in special education	"Lack of instruction related to writing IEPs" "Individualizing instruction based on student needs"
Opportunities to learn evidence-based practices	2.82/4.0	Structure of the teacher education accelerated program to allow for completion while working	"Removal of barriers for completion" "Opportunity for all" "Quality of program"
Perceptions of field experience	3.63/4.0		

Based on our initial analysis, we have found that programs like PPP can provide career advancement for paraeducators and support staff in schools and curricular innovations that leverage their background and experience can strengthen preparation programs.

Additional Resources

- *CEEDAR Center: Teacher Apprenticeship Resources* *https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/teacher-apprenticeship-resources/*
- *NV|Forward* *https://nvforward.sites.unlv.edu/teaching/*
- Davila Jr, O. (2025). Teaching to transform: Teachers of color and the academy for future educators, a grow-your-own program. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *155*, 1-10.. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104913
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FORGING AHEAD: EMPOWERING EDUCATORS TO MOVE BEYOND ONE TEACH-ONE SUPPORT

Abstract

Co-teaching is a viable option for supporting students' diverse needs in an inclusive setting, however too many educators rely on One Teach-One Support, the least impactful approach. This session offered a Decision-Making Matrix to help co-teachers more quickly identify regrouping approaches that may better serve their students' needs.

Background/Rationale

In 2021, King-Sears and colleagues published a meta-analysis of co-teaching research that provided a clearer picture of the academic outcomes associated with co-teaching. In examining the collective results of co-teaching studies between 1999 and 2019, the researchers concluded that co-teaching in inclusive settings resulted in a medium positive effect ($g = 0.47$) on academic achievement for students with disabilities when compared to the achievement of students with disabilities taught in separate special education classrooms across grade levels and content areas.

In the big picture, the meta-analysis reveals that co-teaching can have meaningful academic benefits for students with disabilities. However, the effect size and distribution of outcomes from individual studies confirm that co-teaching, or what is commonly described as co-teaching, isn't *always* as effective as educators would like. There is emerging evidence that implementation fidelity is a factor (Cook et al., 2021). In other words, how well co-teaching is done is important. Placing two educators in a room does not constitute co-teaching; the educators must strategically engage in co-planning, co-instruction, and co-assessment to meet the needs of their shared group of learners. Additionally, the purposeful and varied use of co-instructional approaches matters. While One Teach – One Support and Team Teaching have value for specific purposes, reliance on these approaches means that all students in a classroom are generally getting the same content in the same way, and there is often little that is substantively different and better for learners than what would be accomplished by a single educator (Jenkins & Murawski, 2023). In essence, co-teachers relying on these approaches do not maximize the full potential of co-teaching.

Although it has long been documented that One Teach – One Support has limited benefit (Cook & Friend, 1995), the approach continues to be the most widely used (e.g., Strogilos et al., 2023). Educators identify limited training and limited or non-existent co-planning time as key barriers to effective implementation of other co-instructional approaches (e.g., Kokko et al, 2021). While it may not be possible for teacher educators to ensure that practicing teachers get more co-planning time, they can provide pre- and in-service teachers with meaningful learning

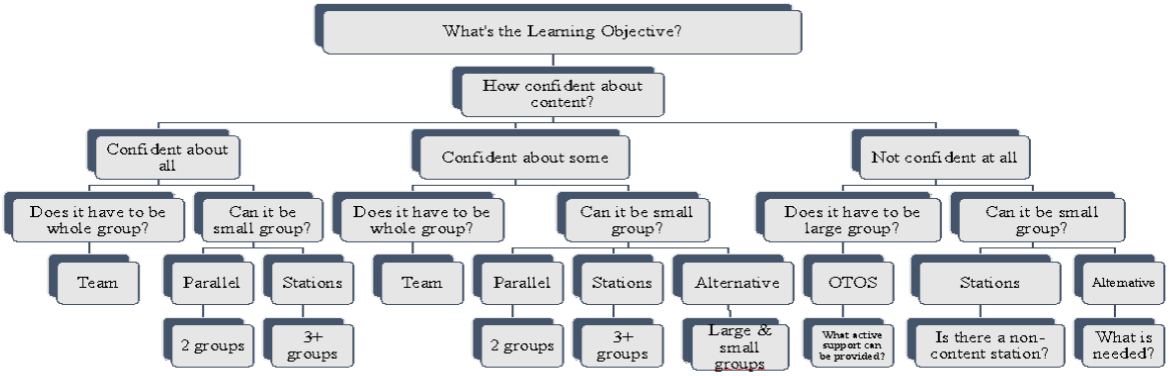
experiences related to co-teaching approaches that elicit better outcomes for students with and without disabilities (Bundock et al., 2023).

Key Session Takeaways

Instructional planning is a complex and iterative process in which educators use assessment data to make decisions about class needs, small group needs, and individual student needs. It is documented that many teachers have difficulty using data to make decisions about instruction (Espin et al., 2021). Given that data-based instructional planning is difficult for solo teachers and that many co-teachers have limited formal training in co-teaching paired with limited opportunities for co-planning, it is understandable that co-teachers are relying on One Teach – One Support as an easy-to-implement, entry level co-instruction approach. There is evidence, however, that co-teachers can be taught strategies to maximize the limited co-planning time they have (Murawski, 2012). The use of normative decision-making approaches, such as decision-making matrices and strengths/needs assessments can facilitate effective and efficient decision making across fields (Jonassen, 2012). Embedding these approaches into teacher preparation for co-teaching may be instrumental in allowing co-teachers to become more intentional in selecting and implementing co-instructional practices that are aligned with student needs, as well as the teachers' unique strengths.

In their recent book, *Connecting High Leverage Practices to Student Success: Collaboration in Inclusive Classrooms*, Jenkins and Murawski (2023) offer a decision-making matrix to help co-teaching teams realize how easily they can choose regrouping approaches to help learners by creating smaller student-teacher ratios. Teacher educators are encouraged to use this matrix to facilitate lesson studies, lesson planning instruction, and other activities related to helping their pre- and in-service teachers recognize the value of small group instruction for inclusion.

Co-Instruction Decision-Making Matrix



Adapted from Jenkins, M.C., & Murawski, W.W. (2023). *Connecting high-leverage practices to student success: Collaboration in inclusive classrooms*. Corwin.

Additional Resources

In addition to their university work, both presenters are consultants with 2Teach Global Educational Consulting. 2Teach Global is an international educational consulting company championing inclusive education around the world.

www.2TeachGlobal.com

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BRIDGING BORDERS: PROMOTING GLOBAL RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Abstract

In today's interconnected world, the need for teacher candidates (TC) to be globally responsive teachers has become paramount. A study abroad program in Luxembourg is designed to immerse dual Elementary Middle Education/Special Education TCs in diverse cultural contexts, while enhancing their understanding of global issues and special education practices.

Background/Rationale

In today's interconnected world, classrooms and educational institutions require TCs to possess global competence to effectively navigate the complexities of both local and global educational environments. Global competence is defined as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable individuals to engage respectfully and responsibly in diverse cultural and global contexts (Crawford, Higgins, & Hilburn, 2020). Teacher education programs play a crucial role in fostering these competencies, preparing educators to excel in an increasingly globalized world. To promote global competence, institutions of higher education can capitalize on various avenues, often encompassed within the broader framework of internationalizing higher education (Richter & Kjellgren, 2023). As highlighted by Kerkhoff & Cloud (2020), international teacher education programs serve as invaluable platforms for educators to enhance their global competency and acquire the knowledge and resources needed to be effective global responsive teachers. The Luxembourg study abroad program at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse exemplifies this approach. The program immerses TCs in diverse cultural environments, offering experiential learning opportunities through interactions with students, educators, and communities from different cultural backgrounds.

The Digital Journal Entry assignment designed specifically for the study abroad program, explored TCs' knowledge, skills, and perspectives related to their global competencies as well as their experiences in the classroom. TCs used the Book Creator app to create a total of 10-digital journal entries, 5 pages each, including 4 different artifacts (i.e., daily reflections, videos, audio recordings, and pictures). TCs used Global Competence Self-Evaluation Rubric, which was adopted from Parmigiani and colleagues (2023), to self-evaluate their global competencies in three areas: Area A – Exploring, Area B – Engaging, and Area C – Acting. They complete the self-evaluations three times: pre, mid, and post.

Key Session Takeaways

TCs successfully used the digital journal entry assignment to document their global competencies. Also, the global competency self-evaluation survey helped them label artifacts in their digital journal entries and uncover their perceptions on how they were developing their global competencies through this study abroad experience. The Luxembourg study abroad answered two research questions:

- Which global competence area is most evidenced by TC's digital journal entries during a four-week study abroad to Luxembourg?
- What are TCs' perceptions of their development of global competencies as a result of the four-week study abroad to Luxembourg?

Table 1 answers the first question. There were some areas where TCs provided **high frequency of evidence.** For example, **A2.a.** I am willing to experience diverse contexts (n=37), **A2.b.** I am willing to seize opportunities to interact with people from diverse contexts (n=27), and **A1.a.** I am open to knowing and learning from people from diverse backgrounds (n=25). There were other areas that had **low frequency of evidence/no evidence.** For example, **C4.b.** I'm able to critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it reinforces negative cultural stereotypes (n=0), **C4.e.** I'm able to use experiences and perspectives of diverse students as conduits for teaching more effectively (n=1), **C5.b.** I'm able to transfer into the school system of origin that I observed during the internship/placement abroad (n=1), **B1.b.** I am aware of the global impact of others' actions on the natural and human world (n=1).

Table 1. *Global Competence Areas Evidenced by Teacher Candidates' Digital Journal Entries*

Areas	Digital Journal Evidence										Total pieces of evidence in three areas
	Week 1			Week 2		Week 3			Week 4		
	DJE #1	DJE #2	DJE #3	DJE #4	DJE #5	DJE #6	DJE #7	DJE #8	DJE #9	DJE #10	
Area A: Exploring	10	11	16	10	9	7	2	8	9	23	105
Area B: Engaging	7	4	6	2	4	5	3	11	5	5	52
Area C: Acting	4	7	3	16	15	13	14	4	8	13	157
Total	**21**	**22**	**25**	**28**	**28**	**25**	**19**	**23**	**22**	**41**	**314**

Table 2 refers to TC's changes of their perceptions on the global competencies through three different points in time (i.e., pre, mid, and post).

Table 2. *Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Their Development of Global Competencies*

Areas of Global Competence	Levels: 0 - not applicable: I'm not involved in this criterion. 1 – emerging: I show a low willingness to explore the criterion. 2 – developing: I show a willingness to explore the criterion but I tend to give up and not to deal with it thoroughly. 3- achieving: I thoroughly explore the criterion. 4 – extending: I thoroughly explore, extend, and practice the criterion independently.														
	TC 1			TC 2			TC 3			TC 4			TC 5		
	Pre	Mid	Post	Pre	Mid	Post	Pre	Mid	Post	Pre	Mid	Post	Pre	Mid	Post
Area A: Exploring	2.7	3.3	4	2.5	2.8	3.2	3.3	3.7	3.3	1.3	2.3	3	2.2	3.3	3.7
Area B: Engaging	2.1	2.3	3.1	2.4	2.8	2.8	2.4	2.4	3.1	1.3	2.3	2.7	1.5	2.3	3.1
Area C: Acting	1.6	2.4	3.5	2.2	2.5	2.7	2.0	2.5	3.2	1.1	2.0	2.4	1.6	2.8	3.1

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PRESERVICE TEACHERS' FIELD EXPERIENCES GONE VIRTUAL: LESSONS LEARNED

Abstract

Field experiences in teacher preparation programs provide opportunities for preservice special education teachers (PSET) to apply skills learned in university coursework and gain confidence supporting students with disabilities. COVID-19 forced universities to reimagine field experiences. This presentation presented lessons learned from virtual field experiences of PSETs tutoring students with disabilities.

Background/Rationale

Learning to teach can be daunting and overwhelming, especially when working with students with learning and behavioral challenges. Individuals preparing to be special education teachers need carefully planned opportunities to apply their university coursework in real-world settings to become familiar with and gain experience with effective practices to support students with various learning and behavioral challenges. These experiences also serve as an avenue for preservice special education teachers (PSET) to build their confidence in supporting the needs of a variety of learners, including those with disabilities.

A goal of special education teacher preparation programs is to provide PSET with pedagogical knowledge, skills, and effective practices to educate students with disabilities. Reforms in teacher education programs call for providing opportunities for future teachers to gain a deeper and more coherent understanding of effective practices (Bain et al., 2009). A critical component of these programs are field experiences. Meaningful field experiences are essential for PSET to practice their skills of meeting the needs of students with a range of academic and behavioral needs (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). Field experiences provide: (a) real-world situations to apply theory and practice (Leko & Brownell, 2011); (b) practice in problem-solving skills and flexibility; and (c) opportunities to gain confidence in teaching students with varying disabilities (Ludlow, Gaylon-Keramidas, & Landers, 2007). Additionally, field experiences provide opportunities for preservice teachers to gain experience with differentiating instruction, managing student behavior and reflecting on their teaching practices (Jackson & Jones, 2019; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012).

Traditionally, field experiences range from classroom observations to practicum-based learning in which students work with individuals or small groups of students, to student-teaching (Billingsley & Scheuermann, 2014). However, Covid-19 severely impacted traditional field experiences and teacher educators had to reimagine this critical component of their program. During the pandemic, some teacher preparation programs shifted their preservice teacher field experiences from in-person to virtual modes. Consequently, this provided an

opportunity for preservice teachers to learn additional skills in effective online teaching and digital literacy (Ersin et al. 2020; Hojeij & Baroudi, 2021). It also required teacher educators to prepare their preservice teachers for the reality of implementing online instruction to a variety of learners, including those with disabilities.

The literature on how universities reimagined virtual field experiences is rather limited at this time due to the time span between the onset of the pandemic and the present. The current presentation describes how one teacher educator and a special education teacher created a valuable alternative to in-person field experiences in the form of virtual tutoring. The study focuses on PSET participants virtually tutoring middle school students with varying disabilities (i.e., autism, learning disabilities) using effective practices to support students' IEP goals in math, reading, spelling, and social skills. The presenters will also share lessons learned through multiple semesters of virtual tutoring between PSET and middle school students with disabilities. This study adds to the limited research on virtual field experiences to prepare PSET and provides implications for teacher preparation programs.

Key Session Takeaways

Providing preservice special education teachers with meaningful field experiences to apply the skills and concepts learned in university coursework is a key component in teacher preparation programs. Virtual field experiences provide unique opportunities for preservice teachers to gain valuable skills implementing online instruction alongside the mentorship of a skilled cooperating teacher and teacher educator. Knowledge gained from this study will contribute to the research on forging ahead with creating meaningful and innovative field experiences to prepare future teachers for a contemporary world. The virtual tutoring model can be an opportunity for preservice teachers to acquire skills needed in an online learning environment. PSET can benefit from increased and innovative opportunities to implement instructional practices, hone their teaching skills, monitor student progress, and engage with students with disabilities to meet IEP goals. Lessons learned from this study can benefit teacher educators in designing effective virtual field experiences with productive outcomes for PSET, practicing teachers, and students with disabilities.

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PERCEPTIONS OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHING

Abstract

Systemic inequities in society pervade education and exacerbate racial inequalities already prevalent in our nation, specifically as they relate to the overrepresentation of Black and Brown students in special education. Current literature suggests that the disproportionality of Black and Brown students in special education is linked to teacher microaggressions and biases. The current research on training and professional development to acknowledge and change implicit biases is limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine the perceptions of preservice teachers through their responses to a series of prompts based on the text "We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom" (Love, 2019).

Background/Rationale

Stereotypes and microaggressions can be catalysts for defiant behaviors in students from underrepresented groups and can impede participation and advancement in academic activities (Harrison et al, 2020). Baker (2019) referenced the definition of microaggressions as the subtle exchanges that take shape as 'put downs' to Black students. Stereotypes and microaggressions stem from implicit biases, or the attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions that we make unconsciously (Haslam, 2018).

According to schema theory, bias informs our understanding of social norms because as we encounter new situations, our brains search for familiarity, and connections to existing knowledge (Haslam, 2018). When we have no schema for a new problem, our brain relies on stereotypes constructed from the environment. Haslam (2018) suggests that educators provide counternarratives to push back against incorrect assumptions when they encounter stereotypes.

Preservice and in-service teachers receive training on implicit bias and how to combat that challenge in the classroom. Training is important, and the strategies learned are effective. However, during professional development sessions, dealing with challenging situations is easy: the stakes are low; and mistakes are allowed. Case studies, scenarios, and vignettes only represent students one *might* encounter in the classroom. While training and professional development for teachers is a logical place to start, it certainly will not be enough. A more inclusive environment for training, focusing on students' cultures and continued research in prejudice reduction techniques is necessary (Harrison et. al, 2020; Kumar et al., 2022, Starck et al., 2020).

Key Session Takeaways

This study seeks to answer two research questions: What are preservice teachers' perceptions of inequities in the education system? How did these perceptions change after reading the shared text as demonstrated by written reflections? This study aims to identify connections that preservice teachers made between the text and the related prompts and how those connections might influence future teaching practices, especially those that would impact Black students.

Participants were tasked with responding to several prompts to complete Reflection 1. The prompts asked participants to summarize their feelings about Chapter 1, define new terms such as abolitionist teaching, "White rage," "Black joy" and "spirit-murdering," react to suspension rates of Black girls compared to their White peers, and describe any notable connections between testing, incarceration rates and the impact to people of color. Participants also examined connections between school funding, social classes, and the education gap. Quotes accompanied each response to expand their thinking and describe how each subtopic would inform their work as future educators.

Participants' initial attitudes were documented after reading the first two chapters of the text and responding to prompts to complete Reflection 1. Initially, participants appeared disconnected from the content discussed in the first chapters. In their responses, participants used the words "sad," "heartbreaking," and "blindsided," to summarize their feelings about the data shared in Chapter 1. The words chosen and the quotes used to support them indicate participants' surface-level reactions. Only one participant was "enraged" by what she read because, as a Black female, she was directly connected to the content and "faced with racial injustice on a daily basis," while her colleagues had differing lived experiences. Responses to the fourth reflection were more in-depth, and participants described actionable steps planned for classroom practice such as advocating for students, collaborating with community partners, and speaking out against unjust actions.

Tenets of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy were used as a priori codes but not all had a strong presence. Sociopolitical consciousness was most relevant with participants noting the perpetuation of cycles of racial injustice, discrepancies in school funding, the influence of White rage and White privilege, and abolitionist and antiracist teaching. Through the data analysis process three categories were created: Feelings about Educational Inequities, Sociopolitical Consciousness and Taking Action as a Conspirator. Using in vivo coding during the initial coding process, several themes emerged including six themes for each of the first to categories and five themes for the third category.

Implications for continued research include providing opportunities for preservice teachers to interact with and experience social justice issues in safe learning spaces before they teach in a classroom of their own. Perhaps working through the issues in a shared text provides the scaffolding preservice teachers need.

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NAVIGATING THE MENTAL HEALTH LANDSCAPE: SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY AND ALLEGHENY HEALTH NETWORK'S CHILL COLLABORATION

Abstract

The Slippery Rock University & Allegheny Health Network's Chill Project Collaborative is an innovative partnership designed to address the mental health crisis among young Americans by integrating the principles of the Chill Project at Allegheny Health Network (AHN) into the education of pre-service teachers at Slippery Rock University (SRU).

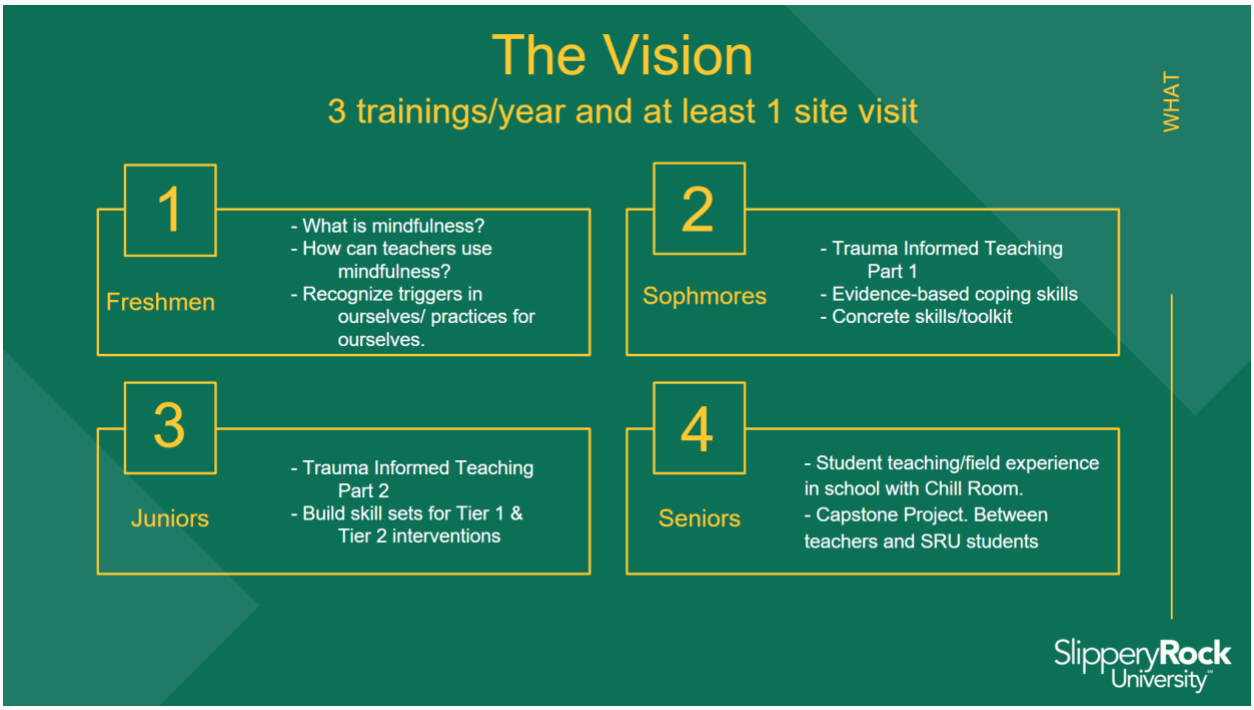
Background/Rationale

Recognizing the escalating rates of depression, anxiety, and stress-related issues among students and the critical role teachers play in their students' lives, this collaboration between Slippery Rock University and Allegheny Health Network' aims to equip future educators with the tools and knowledge necessary to foster a supportive and mindful classroom environment. Pre-service teachers at Slippery Rock University are introduced to a comprehensive mindfulness-based program that includes training in identifying, discussing, and positively responding to stress and anxiety, both in themselves and their future students. The program covers various aspects of mental health support such as one-to-one counseling, support groups, medication management, and school-based outpatient services with a strong emphasis on preventative measures and professional development opportunities tailored to the unique needs of today's educators.

Key Session Takeaways

This session discussed the key objectives of the collaboration, which include enhancing pre-service teachers' personal mindfulness and stress management skills, ensuring they are well-prepared to handle the pressures of the teaching profession, as well as providing future educators with strategies to incorporate mindfulness exercises into their teaching practices, aiming to improve student engagement, classroom management, and overall learning outcomes. The collaborative also aims to strengthen the ability of pre-service teachers to build positive relationships within the school community, including with students, colleagues, and parents and develop a network of support for pre-service teachers through access to mental health resources and professional development opportunities related to mindfulness and education.

Pre-service teachers are provided the opportunity to engage in four years of training during their time at Slippery Rock University which includes the following programming:



Additional Resources

- Link to learn more about Allegheny Health Network's Chill Project: https://www.ahn.org/services/psychiatry-mental-health/mindfulness/chill-project
- Katie Leckenby's article on utilizing mindfulness-based practices in the college setting: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1368479

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NAVIGATING THE MENTAL HEALTH LANDSCAPE FROM THE PRESERVICE TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE: SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY AND ALLEGHENY HEALTH NETWORK'S CHILL COLLABORATION

Abstract

The Slippery Rock University & Allegheny Health Network's Chill Project Collaborative is an innovative partnership designed to address the mental health crisis among young Americans by integrating the principles of the Chill Project at Allegheny Health Network (AHN) into the education of pre-service teachers at Slippery Rock University (SRU).

Background/Rationale

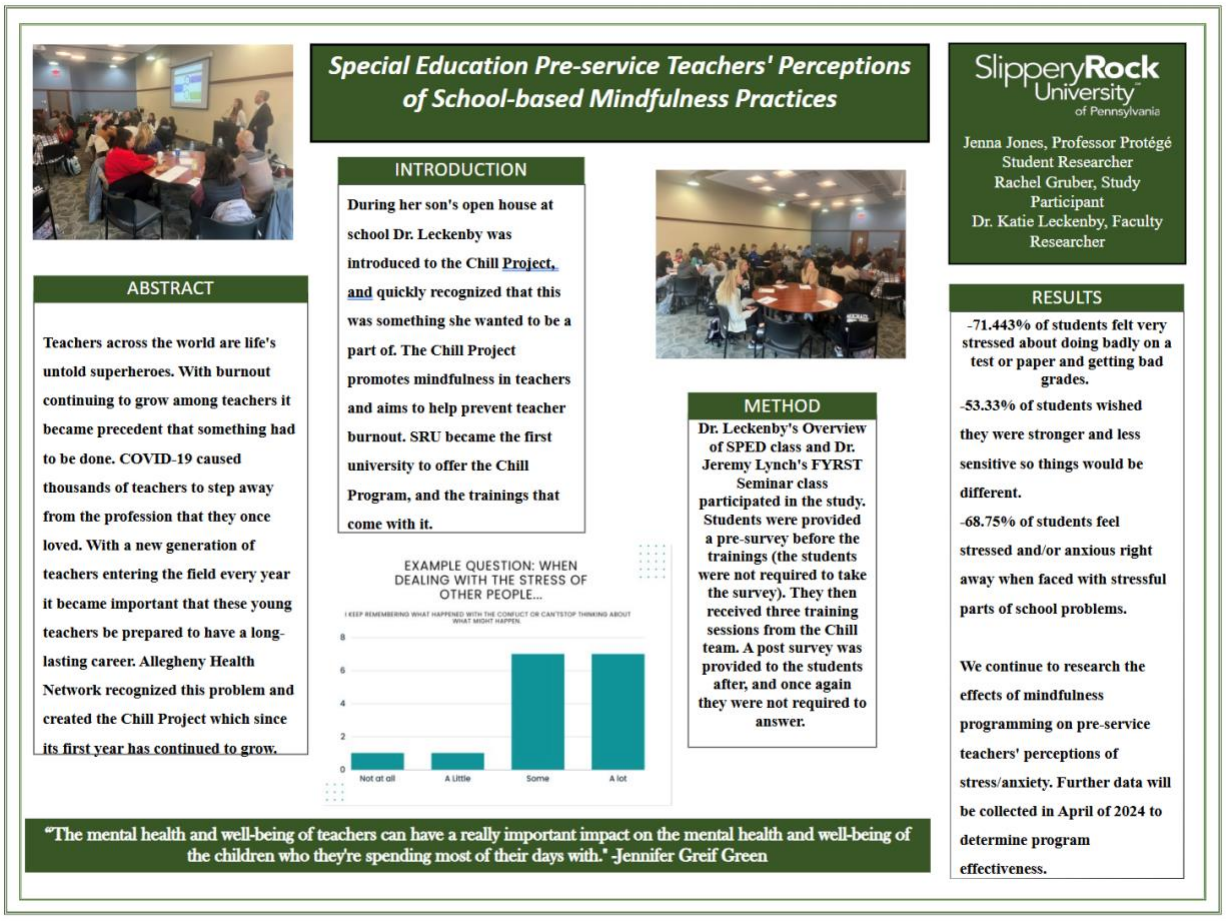
The mental health crisis is a big problem for young people in America, with more and more kids, teenagers, and young adults feeling very depressed, anxious, and stressed out. A lot of studies and reports have shown that these issues are getting worse. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found out that the number of high school students who felt very sad or hopeless increased from 26% in 2009 to over 40% in 2019. After the COVID-19 pandemic, things have gotten even tougher for young folks, making them feel even more stressed and anxious.

While examining the effects of COVID-19 on college students' mental health in the United States, researchers found that the long-lasting pandemic situation is bringing negative impacts on higher education (Son et al., 2020). The findings of their study highlight the urgent need to develop interventions and preventive strategies to address the mental health of college students.

Even though more young people need help, a lot of them aren't getting it. In 2019, out of all the young people who felt really depressed, only about 60% got any kind of treatment or talked to a professional about their feelings. These numbers and facts tell us that it's really important to find ways to help young people deal with their mental health. This could mean teaching more about mental health in schools, making it easier to get help, and making sure everyone knows it's okay to talk about feeling sad or stressed. The Chill Project is one way to help teachers and schools do just that.

Key Session Takeaways

This poster session presented data collected by pre-service teachers who participated in mindfulness-based training provided via a collaboration with Slippery Rock University and Allegheny Health Network's Chill Project. When surveying pre-service teachers enrolled in a teacher preparation program, approximately 71% of students felt very stressed about their grades while approximately 69% of students felt stressed about school-related problems. These statistics highlight the need to mindfulness practices.



Additional Resources

- Link to learn more about Allegheny Health Network's Chill Project: https://www.ahn.org/services/psychiatry-mental-health/mindfulness/chill-project
- Katie Leckenby's article on utilizing mindfulness-based practices in the college setting: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1368479

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USING ASSESSMENT DATA TO FORGE AHEAD WITH DATA-DRIVEN PLANNING

Abstract

Comprehensive data-driven planning is a process that uses multiple sources of student assessment data to determine, implement, and monitor differentiation, accommodations, and interventions to improve student learning within classrooms and schools by all educators. This process develops and improves educators' understanding and application of decision-making procedures, including the utilization of various assessment sources, to use data analysis for purposes in instruction, interventions, and comprehensive support services for all students. This continuous, comprehensive data-driven planning (DDP) process establishes connections specifically within the multiple tiers of instruction and interventions in academics and behavior within Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) frameworks. This process provides explanations and illustrative resources of the essential steps and elements involved in determining educational solutions using data by educators in educational settings.

Background Rationale

Research suggests (Gesel et al, 2021) and policy requires (ESSA, 2014) educators use procedures to make data informed decisions to support and enhance learning by all students within MTSS frameworks. The rationale for the enhanced and systematic use of data-driven planning (DDP) within MTSS frameworks is to integrate and focus instruction and interventions to the specific, data-driven needs through instructional planning of individual students (Deno, 2015; Slanda & Little, 2023). Within the last few years, the use of classroom DDP as a means for school improvement and professional development has increased (Lemons et al, 2017). The term "data-driven planning" describes the multiple uses of data to address instructional (academic and behavioral) issues, concerns, and problems within classrooms and schools within inclusive settings CEEDAR, 2023.). This process is used to continuously monitor student learning for adjustments to methods and resources; to determine interventions; and to identify multiple services within educational systems to meet student educational needs (Little & Puig, 2025).

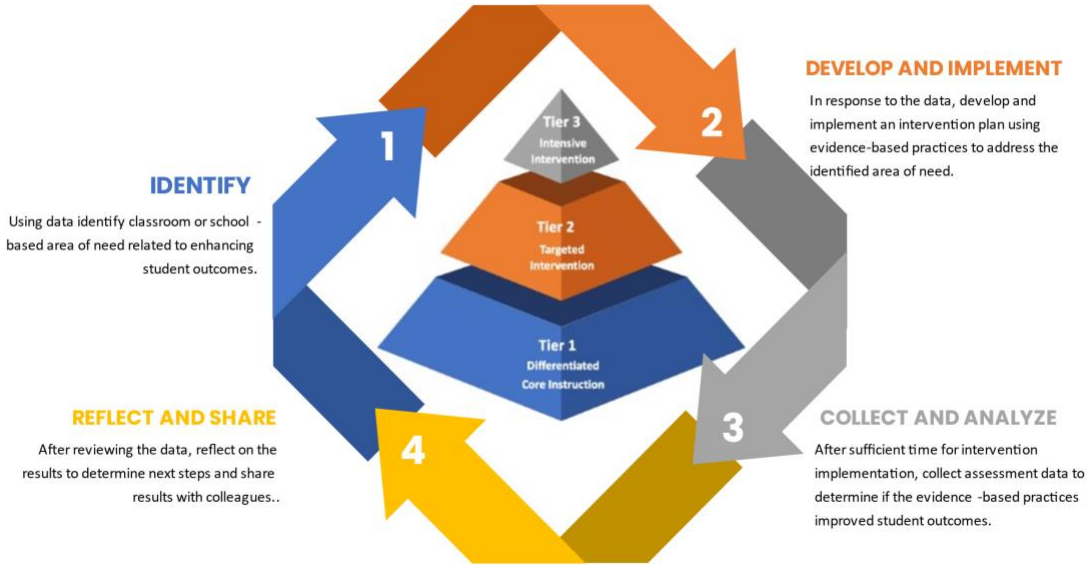
Data-driven planning is defined as a process in which educators systematically reflect on their practice and make changes to their instruction based on careful analysis of current classroom assessment data from their students (Little et al, 2024). This interactive, cyclical, and dynamic process approach to instructional DDP involves knowledge of data collection, evidence-based instructional practices and resources, and informal and diagnostic assessments to continuously monitor student results by teachers and other educators within classrooms. This process is integral and utilized within the tiers of the MTSS framework to continuously address student needs and monitor solutions to enhance student learning.

Key Session Takeaways

Comprehensive data-driven planning is a process that uses multiple sources of student assessment data to determine, implement, and monitor necessary instructional decision-making including differentiation, accommodations, and interventions to improve student learning within classrooms and schools by all educators. This information demystifies, describes, and connects the data-driven planning process of action research within school-wide Multi-Tiered System of Support frameworks. It also includes descriptions and examples of key phases and components of educational solution-finding for educators within our classrooms and schools. Comprehensive DDP processes utilize the knowledge, skills, and phases of action research within classrooms and schools by all educators, including special and general education teachers, school psychologists, and other related service personnel, within one system of data use for instruction, interventions, and determination of needed services and supports within the tiers of the MTSS framework.

Figure 1 conceptualizes the process of data-driven planning and decision-making as a comprehensive, iterative process that integrates the components of decision-making within the multiple tiers of the Multi-Tiered System of Support framework.

Figure 1. *Data-driven planning process*



The use of data-driven decision-making (DDDM) within the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework by teachers, instructional coaches, interventionists, and other classroom and school-based educators. The DDDM process is integral to address the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of students with diverse learning needs within an MTSS framework for data collection and analysis to develop unique instructional and intervention plans for students.

Additional Resources

Center on MTSS provides technical assistance, resources, and tools to support states and districts in the implementation of MTSS https://mtss4success.org/
National Center for Intensive Interventions (NCII) provides technical assistance, resources, toolkits, resources, training, and implementation supports to states, districts, and educator preparation programs to implement MTSS and intervention. https://intensiveintervention.org
CEEDAR Center on evidence-based content enhancement modules, professional development resources, and innovation configurations to implement data-driven planning and additional topics to enhance inclusion through collaboration. https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/
I-MTSS is an integrated MTSS model of support that brings together a research network that includes the Meadows Center, Ci3T, IMFR, and IMTSS at UCONN. Each of these projects includes resources that assist educators. https://mtss.org
Center on PBIS shared tools, publications, resources, and presentations/videos to support schools and other agencies. https://www.pbis.org/
Reviews, summaries, and examples of various assessments within multiple tool charts for reading, mathematics, and behavior to use as sources of data within planning processes. https://intensiveintervention.org/tools-charts/overview

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POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS THROUGH SCHOOL FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Abstract

A large body of research supports the importance of family involvement in raising youth. Children who feel more supported by their families are more likely to experience both academic and social benefits. Family-school partnership activities such as communicating with teachers and school personnel, attending school events, and participating in organizational leadership are components of multifaceted interventions that directly support effective family management practice and promote the well-being of children and adolescents.

Background/Rationale

Family engagement in education has long been championed as a solution to support adaptive child development. Research suggests that creating family-school connections to support children's learning is grounded in one of the most prominent and empirically supported theories (Darling, 2007). Families represent the first essential system where children develop secure attachments, establish routines, and access opportunities for nurturance and early stimulation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Schools provide the context for children to acquire information, interact in diverse social situations and solve academic and interpersonal problems. Together, families and schools form the foundations on which children build academic, language, social-behavioral, and a host of other life skills.

Educational policy emphasizes the importance of promoting family engagement. *Family-school partnerships* are approaches wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate in establishing meaningful roles and practices to enhance opportunities and experiences for children (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Decades of research supports the finding that children experience better academic and social outcomes when there is support provided by families and schools (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). In fact, parents who participate in their child's education are more likely to have better grades, spend more time on homework, persist and complete high school, and enroll in college (Perna & Titus, 2005). Another aspect of family-school interventions concerns the quality of the relationships between parents and teachers (Sheridan et al., 2019). Collaborative activities such as co-creating educational or behavioral goals, sharing the responsibility for implementation action plans, and utilizing intentional methods to monitor students' performance are increasingly common (Sheridan et al.).

Parent engagement and family partnerships are effective ways to promote positive learning, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes for children. Therefore, a model that translates family partnership ideas, insights, and activities from research to classroom application in real world contexts is important. The purpose of this TED session was to provide educators with a

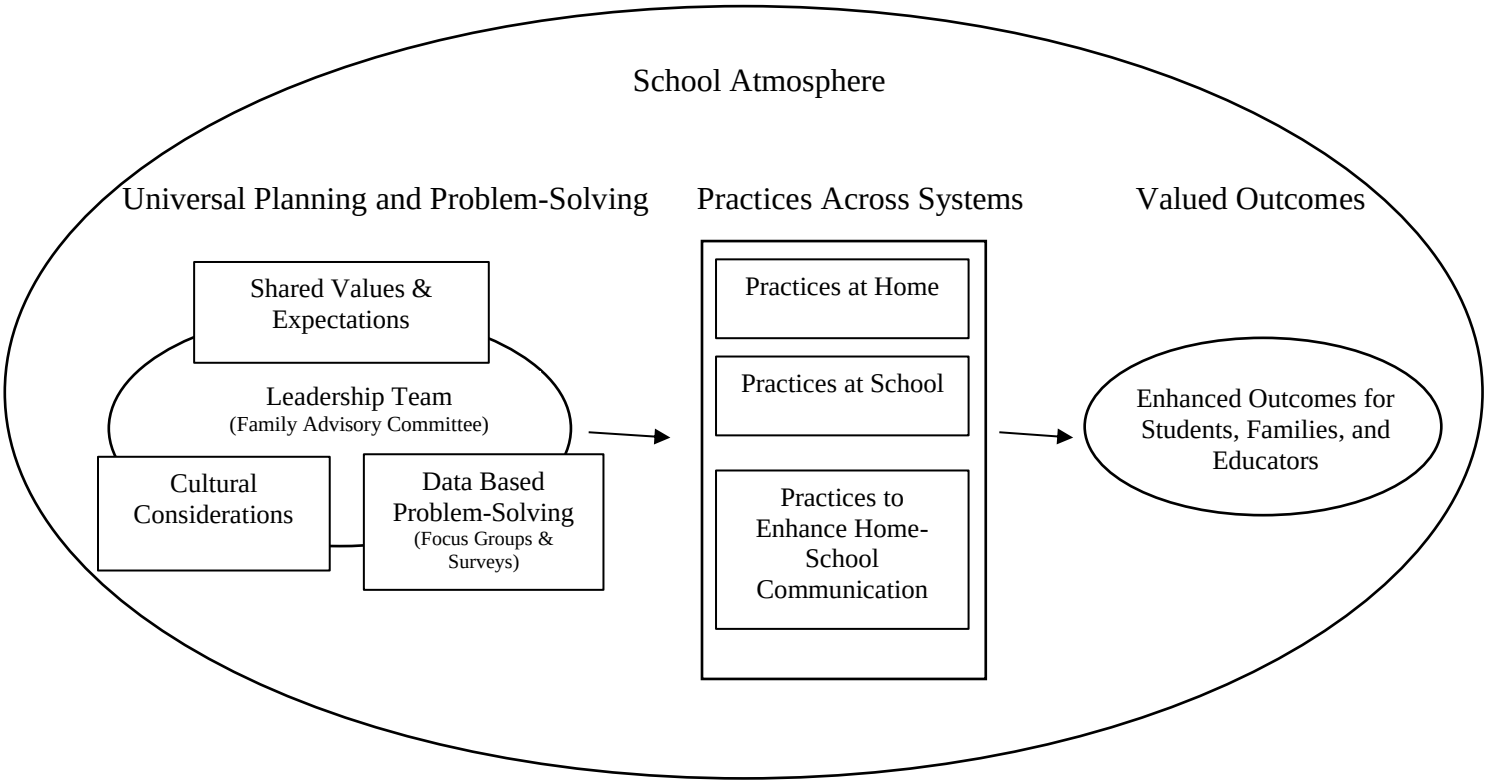
framework that acts as a foundation for developing family-school partnerships to improve outcomes for students, families, and educators.

Key Session Takeaways

Schools and educators should be equipped with knowledge how children are influenced by the world around them and understand the importance of establishing partnerships with families to create a sense of belonging within the school community. This includes:

1. Understanding the influences of parenting on child development across practices at home and school.
2. Creating family school connections rooted in universal planning and problem solving
3. Utilizing home-school communication that promote enhanced outcomes for students, families, and educators.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Model of Family Engagement*



Note: Source: Adapted from Garback et al. (2016)

The framework highlights schoolwide family partnerships that promotes engagement, shared values, and healthy communication. Family involvement matters for school success. Families must be a part of the continuous web of supports that promote positive and healthy development. Over the years, youth experience immense changes and develop the cognitive skills and identities that serve as the cornerstone of their adult lives. Family-school partnerships that are distinguished by opportunities to communicate and participate in school-based programs are likewise associated with students' healthy adjustment across their educational experiences.

Additional Resources

- A school building framework for building school family partnerships: https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf
- A toolkit of resources for engaging families and the community as partners: https://www.parentcenterhub.org/toolkit-of-resources-for-engaging-families-and-the-community-as-partners/
- Resources for developing family partnerships and/or tools for continuous improvement of family partnerships: https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-3/family-partnerships/

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TEACHER CANDIDATES AS COLLABORATORS: PREPARING FOR SUCCESSFUL MEETING LEADERSHIP

Abstract

Focused on the integration of Collaboration High Leverage Practices (HLPs) into educator preparation programs, The DEEPER Framework guides planning for systematic preparation of teacher candidates to participate in and lead meetings. The framework focuses on the development of course and field-based content for the acquisition and application of collaborative skills. Specific application contexts focus on preparing teacher candidates to collaboratively schedule staff working within classrooms, engage in parent/teacher meetings, and proactively communicate with administrators during professional evaluation meetings.

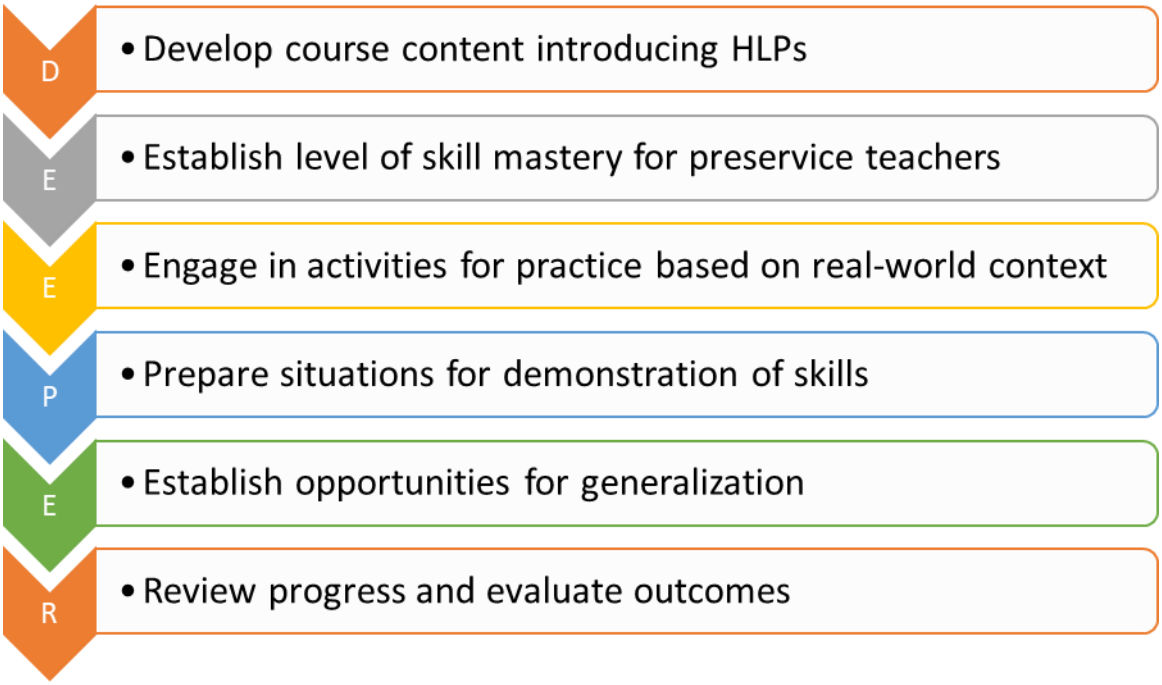
Background/Rationale

At the center of the special education process is the facilitation of meetings to support students' learning. Collaboration is an essential skill for teacher candidates as they focus on planning and implementing services to meet the diverse needs of learners. Although educator preparation programs address competencies related to collaboration and embed effective communication strategies in coursework, teacher candidates often report a lack of confidence as an active participant in meetings with families. District administrators have expressed concern over new special education teachers' lack of experience with establishing the parent relationships required to produce family-centered and legally compliant Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) (Werts et al., 2002). In practice, IEP teams focus more on the parents physically being present than on their meaningful participation (Wolfe & Duran, 2013). Families consistently report that their participation is thwarted with use of special education jargon and by the team's lack of respect for family perspectives (Gershwin et al., 2023). Collaboration extends beyond IEP meetings to all interactions with parents, as well as, collaboration and communication with staff working in the classroom and building/district administrators. Systematically teaching collaboration and communication skills within educator preparation programs enables teacher candidates to enter the classroom with strategies to produce effective outcomes in a variety of collaborative situations.

Key Session Takeaways

The Deeper Framework was developed and applied to bolster teacher candidates' collaborative skills in three specific contexts: support staff scheduling, parent/teacher meetings, and professional evaluation meetings. In each context the steps of the framework are applied through coursework and/or field experiences. Initial content is introduced, implemented, and ultimately evaluated for effectiveness by the instructor or field experience supervisor based on teacher candidates' outcomes.

Figure 1. *The DEEPER Framework*



The application of The DEEPER Framework within each context is detailed below:

To teach collaborative skills for support staff scheduling, candidates are presented with content related to working with support staff and models of effective scheduling and routines. Candidates engage in class activities focused on altering a schedule to accommodate an absent staff member. Materials are provided to support application and multiple scenarios are utilized to increase generalization. Finally, candidates' plans are reviewed to evaluate the effectiveness of the content and class activity.

To teach collaborative skills for parent/teacher meetings, communication strategies (e.g., LAFF don't CRY and MAPS) are introduced as course content. Expectations for verbal/nonverbal communication and content contributions during meetings are also presented with examples and nonexamples. Within the course, students engage in a mock parent/teacher meeting and receive feedback on their performance. Candidates are then expected to engage with families during the

student teaching experience to generalize the use of communication skills to a classroom setting. Student teaching supervisors monitor candidates' engagement with families.

To teach collaborative skills for professional evaluation meetings, candidates review an evaluation tool that will be used throughout their practicum and student teaching field experiences. During the practicum field experience the semester prior to student teaching, students complete an abbreviated version of the evaluation tool with their mentor teacher and supervisor. During this meeting, the candidate practices leading the meeting and sets a goal for student teaching based on the evaluation. During student teaching, the candidate tracks their performance related to the goal and includes that information while leading evaluation meetings at two points during student teaching. This goal-centered focus allows students to take personal accountability for the process and outcomes.

Additional Resources

- LAFF Don't CRY Communication Strategy: https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451209353443
- MAPs Action Planning System: https://doi.org/10.1177/004005999002200210
- Additional Revised HLP content: https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/high-leverage-practices/

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FORGING INNOVATIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PREPARATION: EXAMINING MENTEE AND MENTOR PERSPECTIVES FOR PRACTICUM PLACEMENTS IN PART C ENVIRONMENTS

Abstract

Pre-service educators in early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) require comprehensive preparation to support young children with disabilities and their families effectively. This preparation involves combining theoretical knowledge and practical experiences across settings for children from birth to age eight. In this TED presentation, we described an approach for authentic learning in home environments for children and their families receiving EI services and the perspectives of mentors/mentees who participated in the placement.

Background/Rationale

Pre-service educators' preparation for EI/ECSE involves the consideration of many different components, including (a) approaches for assessment, curriculum, and instruction, (b) licensure requirements, (c) scope and sequence of child development, (d) family-centered practices, and (e) opportunities to make connections between research and practice in authentic learning environments. To meet these preparation needs, faculty must develop a plan and program of study for comprehensive knowledge and skills beyond traditional classroom learning. Recent guidelines for EI/ECSE preparation emphasize clinically rich field experiences and active student participation (DEC Ethics Position Statement, 2022; EI/ECE Crosswalk, 2020). When faculty incorporate these guiding documents into their programs of study, aspiring educators have the support needed to effectively bridge the critical gap between theoretical learning and practical application (Odom, 2009). By engaging in authentic learning experiences across diverse settings, pre-service educators can observe professional practices, reflect on their observations, and develop a more nuanced understanding of their future professional roles.

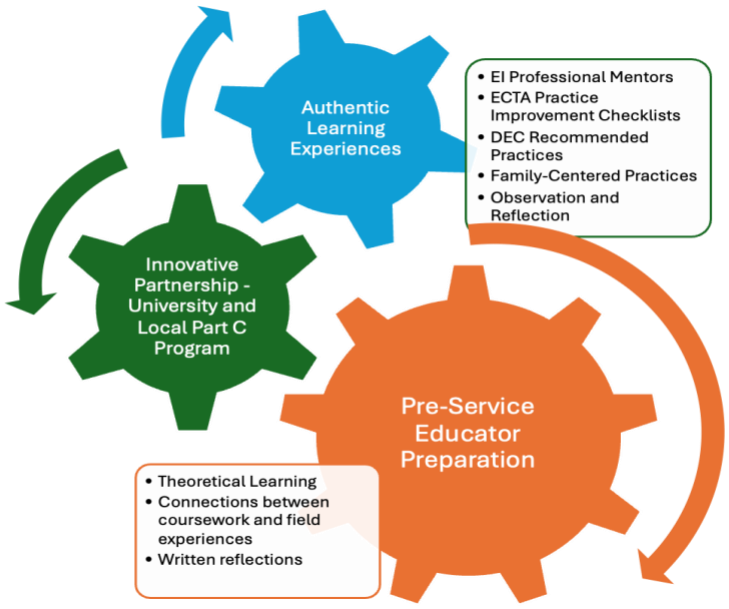
Authentic learning experiences and/or experiential learning involve opportunities for pre-service educators to observe and implement evidence-based practices in the natural settings of young children and their families (O'Brien et al., 2023; Vesely et al., 2016). To develop and embed authentic learning opportunities for pre-service educators, faculty must prioritize developing and maintaining relationships with community partners (McCorkle et al., 2022; Nichols et al., 2023).

The purpose of this TED presentation was to (a) provide an overview of an authentic learning experience developed between a university program and a Part C program (McCorkle et al., 2022) and (b) share perspectives of both mentors (EI professionals) and mentees (pre-service educators).

Key Session Takeaways

Efforts to promote authentic learning in the Part C program allowed pre-service educators to observe relationship-building practices used by EI personnel with young children and their families (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Components for Pre-Service Educator Preparation*



This session also included preliminary findings from a qualitative study designed to understand the experiences of mentors and mentees and their recommendations for improvements in the development of this learning experience. Quotes from participants are provided (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Experiences of Mentors and Mentees*

Mentor Experiences	Mentee Experiences
WHY MENTORS SUPPORT MENTEES "So that they have a model for what best practices in the field look like in action, and a chance to reflect and ask questions. It provides a depth to their learning that can't be obtained through the classroom."	**WHAT MENTEES LEARNED ABOUT FAMILY-CENTEREDNESS** **"**Family-centeredness is putting the priorities and concerns of a family first and including families in discussions about how to best help their child."
RECOMMENDATIONS OF MENTORS TO SUPPORT MENTEES "My top recommendations are: family-centered practices, coaching, building family capacity and warm relationships, collaboration with providers and other staff. All of the procedure things (IFSPs, eligibility meetings, transition meetings, etc.) are important to be introduced but will easily be learned on the job."	**TAKEAWAYS OF MENTEES** "Watching how my team interacted with the families helped demonstrate the power of collaborating with families."

Additional Resources

- Division for Early Childhood. (2014). DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education. https://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices

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FORGING AN ESSENTIAL PATH TOWARDS ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH TO PRACTICE GAP: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF PRACTITIONER ARTICLES ADDRESSING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH EBD

Abstract

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) are at an increased risk of short- and long-term academic, social, and economic consequences. The combination of limited teacher preparation and high behavioral support needs for students with EBD can create educational environments that are not conducive to equitable and inclusive educational opportunities. To best support students with EBD, teachers often rely on other resources, including practitioner articles, to identify evidence-based strategies. However, limited information exists related to the availability and accessibility of practitioner articles specifically describing strategies to support students with EBD. This presentation highlighted findings from our recent systematic literature review conducted to (a) identify practitioner-friendly articles available to teachers who work with students with EBD; (b) examine the research base for academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports for students with EBD in practitioner-friendly articles; and (c) identify the open-access availability of the included practitioner-friendly articles. Implications and considerations for the field were discussed.

Background/Rationale

Students with EBD may have needs related to academic, behavioral, and social-emotional functioning (Cook et al., 2016). Because of this, the use of evidence-based practices can help them develop in these areas in practical and significant ways (Wood et al., 2016). However, it is currently unclear what practitioner papers are available to address specific academic content areas, social emotional skills, and behavioral skills and to what extent these are used by practitioners. Additionally, there are specific teaching strategies that have been found to be evidence-based practices (e.g., direct instruction). Currently we do not know the number of articles that focus on these specific teaching strategies. Similarly, it is unclear, based on the availability of practitioner papers, how they are delineated across grade bands. Because of this, it is important to examine the trends in practitioner papers for students with EBD over the last 25 years.

To what extent teachers have access to practitioner articles is another important consideration, as many journals publish articles behind a paywall. Particularly, those journals which have the highest impact factors (i.e., have the highest impact in the field) are more likely to require paid subscriptions to access articles than journals with lower impact factors. Additionally, there is

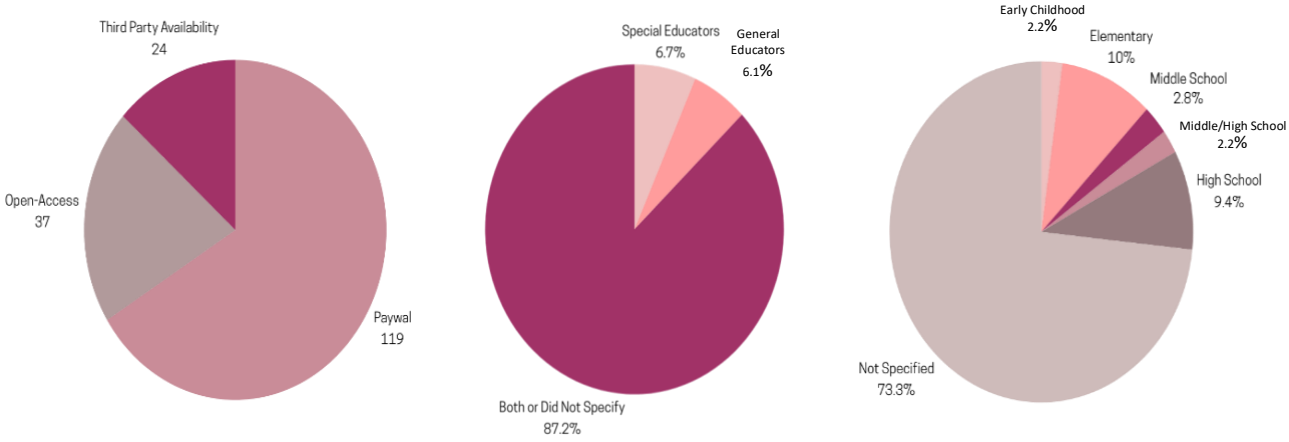
currently no list of all available teacher/practitioner journals. It is for these reasons that examining the availability of articles to practitioners is a worthwhile endeavor.

Key Session Takeaways

This literature review focused on practitioner papers because teachers can use practitioner papers to ensure evidence-based practices are implemented with their students with EBD. When researchers work to close the gap between research and practice, we ensure teachers know how to use the work we have done to improve student outcomes.

To conduct the review, we followed the guidelines outlined by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Page et al., 2021). Our search resulted in 180 practitioner articles. Figure 1 provides a visual description of the number and/or percentage of included articles by accessibility, audience, and grade band.

Figure 1. *Included Articles by Accessibility, Audience, and Grade Band*



Overall, results of the literature review describe how almost 40% of the articles identified in the review were published in *Beyond Behavior,* and most were published in journals specific to special education. The number of articles focused on supporting students with EBD has increased over time. Also, a majority of articles were written for both special education and general education teachers or did not specify a target audience (87.2%; 157). Similarly, most articles identified in the review did not specifically address the needs of a particular grade band (73.3%; 132). Additionally, most articles (119) included in the review were available only behind a paywall (through paid subscription). Lastly, although disproportionality exists in the field of special education that results in marginalized and minoritized students being overrepresented in disciplinary data and the category of EBD (US Department of Education, 2024), there was a limited number of articles (3) identified that describe use of culturally responsive practices.

Additional Resources

- *Exceptionality* article on analysis of special education practitioner journals and focusing on behavior: https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2019.1579724
- Description of High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities related to Social/Emotional/Behavioral from Council for Exceptional Children (CEC): https://highleveragepractices.org/four-areas-practice-k-12/social-emotional-behavioral

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TRAUMA AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Abstract

Emotional Disturbance/Emotional Behavioral Disorders (ED/EBD), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and Trauma share overlapping characteristics. As per recent data (USDOE, 2023; CEC, 2020), 4.3% of students with disabilities are classified with ED, while 14.5% have parents who have discussed emotional or behavioral difficulties with healthcare providers or school staff. Notably, 2.9 million children have been prescribed medication for these issues. The CDC (2024) indicates that 61% of adults report experiencing at least one type of ACE, with 16% having experienced four or more. Although these categorizations can sometimes be synonymous, they do not statistically align. Critical services, including therapy and community resources, are essential in supporting students, and expanding trauma-responsive educator training is pivotal for enhancing educational and social outcomes.

Background/Rationale

This research aims to align categories, address challenges, and foster positive progress while supporting students' holistic needs. In the fields of health and education, conversations often progress at different rates; increased alignment could lead to substantial positive outcomes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) recognizes disability as a natural part of life, emphasizing the importance of improving educational outcomes for children to promote equality, participation, and independence. Legally, we must provide education and services to children with disabilities, including those with ED/EBD, as well as those with higher ACE scores or known traumatic experiences, which is vital for influencing their success.

ACEs, as defined by the CDC (2024), encompass various forms of abuse (emotional, physical, sexual), neglect, and household and community challenges (e.g., substance misuse, violence). Research from ChildTrends (2019) shows that young children who experience trauma may struggle with attachment, excessive fear, eating and sleeping issues, and regression after reaching developmental milestones. School-age children may display aggressive behavior, withdrawal, fixation on safety, reenact traumatic events through play, nightmares, and difficulties concentrating. Adolescents may experience anxiety or depression, engage in risk-taking or self-destructive behaviors, and harbor feelings of guilt, anger, or shame, sometimes leading to thoughts of suicide or revenge.

The Council for Exceptional Children (2020) defines Emotional Disturbance as including traits that negatively impact a child's educational performance, such as hyperactivity, immaturity, learning difficulties, challenges in maintaining relationships, withdrawal, unhappiness, depression, and physical symptoms linked to personal or school issues.

Key Session Takeaways

ED/EBD and ACEs significantly influence attention span, decision-making, development, learning, social interactions, and stress responses. Both groups require individualized instruction and interventions that build on strengths while addressing triggers and antecedents to behavior. Supportive services and strategies may involve counseling, psychiatric consultation, direct special education services, behavior analyst consultations, structured lessons, modulated pacing, and frustration prevention, irrespective of categorization.

Training and support are crucial for managing behaviors and fostering healthy relationships to assist children in their educational journeys. Practitioners must promote resilience, create safe environments, and provide essential support when navigating challenges related to ED/EBD and ACEs. By adopting a trauma-informed approach and acknowledging the impact of adverse experiences, we can advance efforts in promoting positive mental health and well-being for all students, regardless of their categorizations.

This subject is significant in the field as Emotional Disturbance is one of the thirteen categories under the IDEA, and early intervention is critical. While a smaller percentage of students with disabilities are classified with Emotional Disturbance, a considerable number of adults report encountering at least one type of ACE. These disparities may indicate that individuals are being overlooked, which can contribute to the discrepancy between diagnosis and prevalence, as many traumatic experiences lead to shame or stigma. Behaviors perceived as 'disruptive' in the classroom can often stem from traumatic experiences, adversely impacting academic success, particularly with disciplinary measures like suspension or expulsion.

Explicit, trauma-responsive training is essential for identifying those currently in need, preventing the continuation of adverse experiences, and avoiding retraumatization. A compassionate, curious approach is vital for discerning whether behaviors are manifestations of traumatic experiences in addition to, or instead of, other diagnoses. This holistic perspective is crucial for effectively teaching and treating the individual, delivering optimal services, and fulfilling IDEA requirements. Positive environments are necessary to support educators, students, and families, especially given that factors such as heredity, stress, family functioning, socioeconomic status, and abuse often contribute to Emotional Disturbance and perpetuate generational trauma cycles.

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HOW DO THEY DO IT ALL?
OUR NOT-SO-SECRET STRATEGIES TO SUCCESS IN A STRESSFUL PROFESSION

Abstract

Special educators at all levels face stress and burnout. Higher education adds an additional layer of pressure. Faculty who are successful at grant-writing, publishing, teaching, consulting, and service shared what keeps them in the profession with only minimal stress-induced tantrums.

Background/Rationale

It is a well-known fact that special educators burn out quickly. Faced with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Park & Shin, 2020), they find that they cannot keep up with the expectations from themselves and others. Special education faculty not only face the same expectations and stressors of our field but are additionally faced with the stressors of university life. There is a "publish or perish" expectation, as well as the need to maintain excellent teaching, responsive student feedback and communication, management of grants and other projects, and a significant amount of university service work. Many special education faculty find themselves overworked, stressed, and anxious. When asked "how are you?", the ubiquitous answer is "busy." It is critical that TED members have the opportunity to share those stressors and, even more importantly, hear strategies from veteran TED members who have managed to find ways to avoid or at least minimize the stress.

Key Session Takeaways

Five faculty who have been exceptionally successful in various aspects of higher education shared their perspectives, tips, and strategies. While each shared their own specific areas, the following tips were shared by all.

Find overlap. Look for how plans, schedules, ideas, research and writing interests intersect. Don't write just one paper; write two for different journals or with slightly different angles. Turn a grant proposal literature review into an article. Get on committees that align with research interests or have colleagues you want to work with on other topics. Seek multiple usages.

Find collaborators. Make friends. Find others that make you accountable for projects. Divide and conquer. Create a group that writes or does research together; rotate who leads each article or conference presentation. Surround yourself with people who care about your success and who you can cheer for as well. Use networks like TED to find camaraderie and support. This can also help support the service component of your vita; join committees at TED, meet new collaborators, present and write together *and* get service credit!

Find time. Avoid complaining and admiring the problem; sit down and make a schedule. Become master of your calendar by adding in time for mundane tasks (laundry), fun time (family), self-care time (mindfulness or TV), writing/research time, prepping class time, and so on. Share your calendar with your loved ones. Embrace lists, reminders, and calendar invites.

Find an organizational system. Streamline anything you can. For example, create grading banks for assignment comments and slide decks that can be used repeatedly over time. Develop email templates for administrative tasks or repetitive events throughout the academic year. Save these to a document where they can be cut and pasted directly into email. Avoid individual e-mail messages and compile all non-urgent messages each week into one email or announcement that can be sent to all students. Create folders, subfolders, and subfolders for the subfolders to keep documents and notes in a place where they can be easily located. Be willing to delegate and to find others to support your organizational needs if this is an area you lack.

Find your voice. Limit your *Voluntold* experiences. Be sure to say "yes" to the activities that not only feed your soul but also can be used for multiple items on your annual evaluation. If you want to say "no," be prepared to share why that particular opportunity is not right for you. Don't forget that you can negotiate – with your Chair, Dean, and other colleagues. Help them identify activities that are a better fit for your interests, skills, time, and talents.

Find your purpose and passion. You don't have to be a rockstar in *every* area of academia. Each of us found the areas that we enjoy doing and we find ways to emphasize those areas. Because each of us enjoys specific areas (e.g., writing or service), it isn't considered a stressor but rather an enjoyable activity. Higher education is a marathon, not a sprint. Create a 5-year vision or plan for yourself. Remember that every "yes" to one thing may mean a "no" to something else. It's best to choose wisely and enjoy the work! You might have to pace yourself; however, by identifying the areas that you truly enjoy, you will avoid burning out while still seeming to "do it all."

Additional Resources

In addition to their university work, all presenters are consultants with 2Teach Global Educational Consulting. 2Teach Global is an international educational consulting company championing inclusive education around the world.

www.2TeachGlobal.com

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LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT: TEACHERS' PERCEPTION IN A RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

Abstract

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a cornerstone of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), yet its implementation in rural middle schools faces significant challenges. This presentation examined the perceptions of general and special education teachers in a small rural middle school regarding LRE, highlighting key barriers such as knowledge gaps, administrative predetermination of placements, insufficient training, and limited resources. The findings of this study revealed widespread misconceptions about LRE, frustration with inconsistent district communication, and the need for ethical decision-making during IEP meetings. Recommendations from the study participants emphasize targeted professional development, transparent policies, and the equitable allocation of resources to support meaningful inclusion. By addressing these challenges, rural schools can better adhere to the IDEA mandates, ensuring that students with disabilities receive appropriate support to thrive in inclusive educational settings. Practical strategies and professional development resources were provided to bridge the gap between policy and practice in rural contexts.

Background/Rationale

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) principle, mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ensures that students with disabilities are educated alongside their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Despite this mandate, implementing LRE in rural middle schools remains a significant challenge due to geographic isolation, limited funding, and staffing shortages (Biddle & Azano, 2016).

Current research indicates that educators still have misconceptions about LRE (add references that support this statement here; what research indicates that?). Many equate it to mainstreaming or differentiation, which oversimplifies its complexity. Teachers in rural settings often lack the training and resources needed to implement IDEA's provisions effectively, leaving them unprepared to make informed decisions during Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings (Cook & McDuffie-Landrum, 2020).

Key Session Takeaways

Understanding LRE Beyond Misconceptions

Implementing the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in rural middle schools requires addressing several critical challenges (Francisco et al., 2020). Many teachers in these settings misunderstand LRE, often equating it with mainstreaming or differentiation. LRE encompasses more than physical placement in general education classrooms; it includes providing tailored aids, services, and supports to ensure equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Educators must move beyond these misconceptions to fully understand and apply the principles of LRE effectively.

The interconnected nature of these elements underscores that only some factors can independently address the challenges of LRE implementation. Instead, a more holistic approach should be considered, where efforts in one area bolster progress in others, creating a well-rounded and effective framework for inclusion.

Training and Resource Gaps

Rural educators need more training and resources to support students in inclusive settings (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Many teachers report lacking training, feeling unprepared to advocate for appropriate placements or support, and needing more professional development on LRE and IDEA compliance. Furthermore, resource limitations, such as insufficient funding for specialized classrooms, exacerbate these challenges. Addressing these gaps through targeted training programs and equitable resource allocation is critical to improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

Practical Strategies for Teacher Support

Teachers need practical strategies and ongoing support to implement LRE. Training programs should focus on ethical practices during IEP meetings, advocacy skills to address resource gaps, and collaborative approaches that strengthen co-teaching and classroom management. Rural schools can create more inclusive and equitable educational environments that allow all students to thrive by addressing these systemic barriers and enhancing teacher preparedness.

Additional Resources

- LRE Video Overview: Watch here
- Understanding Predetermination: Watch here
- IEP Meeting Do’s and Don’ts: Watch here

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DELIVERING AND SUSTAINING IMPLEMENTATION OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES IN MATHEMATICS THROUGH COACHING

Abstract

Educators and researchers have developed and evaluated high-quality evidence-based practices (EBPs) to support students' achievement in mathematics, especially for students with mathematics difficulties (MD). In addition, research indicates that classroom implementation of EBPs by teachers requires performance feedback through instructional coaching. Effective professional learning blends theory and evidence-based practices with performance feedback. This paper described the latest EBPs in mathematics and performance feedback practices to increase implementation fidelity. The rationale, components, and resources were provided to enhance the sustained implementation of these practices.

Background/Rationale

Instructional coaching emphasizes building relationships, promoting reflective practice, and supporting teachers when implementing effective teaching strategies. Sustained instructional coaching and performance feedback offer opportunities to maximize effective implementation of EBPs in the classroom through modeling, feedback, and reflection/analysis (Brownell et al., 2019).

EBPs in mathematics, such as explicit instruction, visual representations, and problem-solving techniques, are powerful tools for both teachers and students (Park et al., 2021). However, it is important to identify the specific components of each of the practices and provide feedback through coaching to improve not only classroom implementation of the EBP with fidelity but also student outcomes (Schneider, 2016). Although research on the productive outcomes of coaching to assure fidelity is scant at this time, initial research reveals that EBPs used with fidelity improve mathematics performance (Reddy et al., 2021; Watkins, 2018). In this paper, we describe the importance, process, and benefits of instructional coaching using performance feedback to enhance implementation of EBPs in mathematics. To illustrate this process, we provide the latest knowledge on EBPs and a 10-item actionable checklist to help teachers easily implement these practices. Then, instructional coaching is described to enhance implementation. Finally, components of an example of an EBP are provided to support specific performance feedback during implementation of EBPs in mathematics to enhance fidelity. By leveraging EBPs along with sustained coaching with performance feedback, teachers can effectively provide EBPs for students with MD. The purpose of this TED session was to illustrate how coaching unlocks the benefits of EBPs for both students and teachers.

Key Session Takeaways

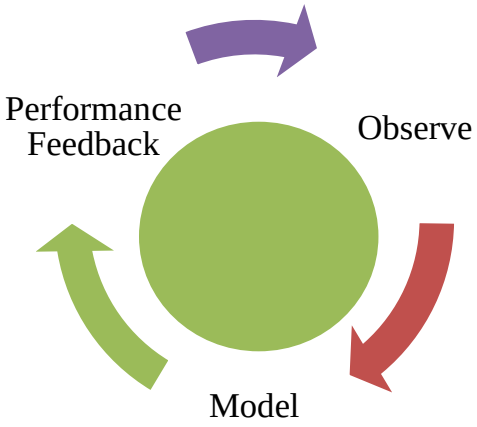
Effective Coaching Practices in a Four-Step Process

Effective coaching practices include a four-step process, starting by establishing alliance-building through a pre-observation, and then modeling, observation, and performance feedback to guide teachers on how to apply these effective coaching strategies specifically to mathematics instruction for students with MD.

Alliance-building refers to establishing trust and rapport between the coach and the teacher (Knight, 2007), assessing the teacher's specific areas of need or interest (Gallucci et al., 2010), and setting measurable goals focused on improving instructional practices (Rock & Hua, 2019). Modeling of effective instructional strategies by coaches or engaging in co-teaching demonstrates new approaches in action (Poglinco et al., 2003). Modeling can occur before the observation if a teacher is using a new practice; observation can come first if the teacher already uses the practice, followed by modeling for correction/feedback. Observation requires coaches to observe the teacher's classroom practices, providing constructive feedback that is specific, actionable, and focused on improvement. Performance feedback allows coaches and teachers to engage in reflective discussions to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies and make necessary adjustments (Schneider, 2016).

Figure 1 shows the four effective coaching practices (alliance-building strategies, observation, modeling, performance feedback) put forth by Pierce (2015).

Figure 1. *Effective Coaching Practices*



Note. Adapted from Pierce (2015), p. 27.

Additional Resources

Resources for Mathematics:

- Assisting Students Struggling with Mathematics: Intervention in the Elementary Grades (ed.gov)
- Teaching Math to Young Children Practice Guide Summary: Educators' Practice Guide Summary
- Improving Mathematical Problem Solving in Grades 4 Through 8 (ed.gov)

Resources for Coaching:

- https://intensiveintervention.org/training/coaching
- https://ncsi.wested.org/resource/effective-practices-for-coaches/
- https://ncsi.wested.org/resource/effective-coaching-practices-infographic/
- https://www.instructionalcoaching.com/resources/resource-library

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SCIENCE OF READING DATASTARS: SHARING OF AN SOR-ALIGNED WEBSITE

Abstract

The Science of Reading (SoR) (Hennessy, 2021; Kilpatrick, 2019; Moats & Tolman, 2019; Scarborough, 2001) is a body of research knowledge that incorporates scientific findings and areas of expertise from a variety of disciplines encompassing education, special education, literacy, psychology, neurology, and cognition. The SoR is grounded in research on how students learn to read, the skills involved in the reading process, how they are related and connect, and brain involvement within reading development (Moats & Tolman, 2019). Through using SoR research, teachers, caregivers/parents, and researchers can implement an evidence-based best practice approach for teaching foundational literacy skills to emerging readers (Cook & Cook, 2016). A virtual database of evidence-based reading strategies grounded in the SoR, known as DataSTARS, was created over the last two years by two professors of reading core classes for pre-service educators and in-service educators to utilize when teaching reading to their students.

Background/Rationale

The term, Science of Reading, refers to the research that reading experts, especially cognitive scientists, have conducted on how we learn to read. The definition of the Science of Reading used in Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement (2020) that was systematically used to guide the development of updated core reading classes syllabi at universities in Ohio includes how students learn to read through using research from cognitive science on how children learn. Additionally, essential elements of reading skills that support literacy and how student needs change across development are reviewed. Essential elements of effective instructional approaches are based on research and best practice. Finally, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support are considered as teachers are encouraged to engage in application of data-based decision making when creating systems of support for all students within their classrooms.

This information is shared in more detail within the DataSTARS (**Database** of **S**haring, **T**eaching, & **A**pplying **R**eading **S**trategies) website and virtual database that was created (Reister & McVey, 2022). Educators are invited to analyze their core reading courses, or what they learned in their own teacher preparation in terms of teaching reading. They are encouraged to find ways to embed instruction on specific SoR principles and consider how they will use resources and online tools that will be shared via the virtual database. These evidence-based reading strategies will foster and promote literacy outcomes within school/community partnerships.

Key Session Takeaways

At the end of the session, attendees will describe the Database of Sharing, Teaching, & Applying Reading Strategies: DataSTARS project, will be able to list some of the demonstration evidence-based reading strategies, and will strengthen their connections to Science of Reading, that will be shared within the DataSTARS project.

Also, at the end of the session, attendees will be able to recall experiences the presenters shared about collaborating with the local schools through the DataSTARS project and will be able to list one to three ways they can implement DataSTARS in their own practice.

Additional Resources

Attendees were provided with an overview of the DataSTARS website that can be accessed here: https://spp.franciscan.edu/datastars/. Attendees were walked through some of the resources provided within each strategy. Additional resources within the website include:

- Learning tasks
- Discussion questions
- Fidelity checklists
- Citations
- Extra resources

Some discussion questions that were implemented throughout the session were:

1) In what way can you consider how you will implement the Science of Reading research in your own practice?
2) Whare are some practical techniques to re-ignite the passion of teaching reading for P-16 teachers and teacher educators?
3) Describe some of the classroom activities that were shared during the presentation.
4) After browsing the virtual database and demonstrations and resources for various evidence-based reading strategies grounded in the Science of Reading, list one or two that can be used when teaching reading.

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SUPPORTING THE WHOLE CHILD: TRAUMA INFORMED CARE PRACTICES FOR EDUCATION

Abstract

Trauma-informed care (TIC) recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands that the road to recovery lies with the professionals that surround the individual who has suffered some type of trauma in their lifetime. Teachers are first responders to support students on a daily basis that begins with recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma in students. One way to understand this is to know about Adverse Childhood Experiences scores (ACEs). When teachers understand the experiences of their students, along with possessing evidence-based tools to support student needs effectively, then student learning will improve. Professionals need to integrate knowledge about trauma into procedures and practices within the school setting. School personnel may not know directly what has happened to students, but there are clear, visible signs that can be seen through manifested behaviors.

Background/Rationale

Traumatic stress occurs when students and adults are deeply affected by an incident that interferes with their daily lives, and can stem from the following: (a) COVID 19 pandemic, (b) bullying, (c) weather disasters, (d) school violence and shootings, (e) accidents/death of friends or family, (f) divorce/separation, (g) racism, (h) homelessness, and (i) generalized emotional disorders. The National survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, found that over 60% of children surveyed experienced some form of trauma, crime, or abuse, with some experiencing multiple traumas. Many times, students do not possess the coping skills necessary to manage the impact of the stressful traumatic events, which will in turn impact student's classroom behavior and learning. Student distraction by intrusive thoughts or flashbacks usually prevent the student form paying attention in class, studying, or even doing well on assessments. Constant exposure to violence can lead to decreased IQ and reading ability. Chronic absenteeism may result if students are not provided support across environments. It is important to communicate with parents or caregivers that can help shed light on situations as well as be open to recommendations communicated by the teacher or counselor.

Parents and teachers are likely to observe some of the following symptoms exhibited by students who have experienced some form of trauma: (a) perseveration- constant focus or daydreaming about traumatic event, (b) avoidance- inability to discuss event or acting like it didn't happen, (c) negative mood- lashing out at others or unnecessarily blaming others, (d) emotional dysregulation- feelings that do not match situations in the school environment. Teachers may have difficulty in understanding student behavior and knowing how to support students to avoid re-traumatization. Educators need to develop language to communicate with diverse and struggling families and co-create shared plans for recovery, support and building long-term resilience in students.

Teachers observe and interact with students on a daily basis for most of the day. Whether or not a school has created and implemented a complete trauma-informed care approach, there are strategies and tools that can be used to assist students. All students can benefit from a trauma-informed care approach and teachers who advocate for all students by forging ahead in delivery of evidence-based therapeutic strategies to build personal resilience in students.

Key Session Takeaways

1. **Using supportive language that increases regulation and emotional well-being**
    a. Always convey respect. The tone of voice can significantly impact how people receive and react to messages.
    b. Ask questions with care. Let students know you are invested in the relationship and their voice matters.
    c. Take your time. Students can read cues and know when they are being rushed and are perceived as a bother.
    d. Be an active listener. Use minimal encouragers to let the student know they are being heard.
2. **Communicate with school personnel, family and caregivers to develop a shared plan for support**
    a. Identify and establish procedures for a school safety team. Every school needs to have a team of trained personnel that can respond in crisis intervention.
    b. Have a system of communication. Create a swift pathway for teachers and staff to indicate concern and seek assistance from the safety teams.
    c. Schedule a team (home and school) meeting to discuss a support plan for the student.
3. **Creating a safe space**
    a. **Designate in class space**- have a dedicated and inviting space with comfortable chairs and a few relaxing activities for students when needed. Ensure these spaces will need to have rules and time limits.
    b. **Sensory (or calming) rooms within the school**- These rooms should not be used if students are escalated. Clear, posted parameters for the room use should be reviewed prior to entry and exit.
4. **Identify Trusted Adults**- students who are more prone to dysregulation, should have a few known trusted adults to whom the student to go to or interact with when they need assistance with co-regulation.

Additional Resources

- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (http://www.nctsn.org/) provides resources for a variety of audiences, including school personnel. A "Trauma Toolkit for Educators"http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/Child_Trauma_Toolkit_Final.pdf; information about responding to a school crisis, school safety, the effects of trauma, disaster response, and service interventions; and a list of web resources are available.
- RAND's "How Schools Can Help Students Recover from Traumatic Experiences Toolkit" (http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2006/RAND_TR413.pdf):

This toolkit provides a menu of programs that schools can implemented to help children recover from trauma, categorized by type of trauma. Recommendations for securing program funding are also provided.

- The Safe Start Initiative (https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/programs/safestart/ImprovingOutcomesforChildrenExposedtoViolence.pdf) is operated by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and works to prevent and reduce children's exposure to violence and expand understanding of evidence-based practices.
- Support for Students Exposed to Trauma (http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR675.html): This trauma-specific intervention was designed for implementation by teachers and school counselors, and the program manual including lesson plans is available for download.
- Trauma Guides: FREE multilingual downloads of Child Mind Institute resources to help communities in the wake of tragic events. Family Resource Center - Child Mind Institute. https://childmind.org/resources/
- Teacher and Parent Resources supporting person centered care in TIC. https://www.healthcaretoolbox.org

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UTILIZING TEACHER EDUCATORS' LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH TO IMPROVE PRESERVICE TEACHERS' LISTENING SKILLS

Abstract

How can teacher educators best help preservice teachers learn effective teaching practices and confidently engage with parents of students with disabilities and other teachers? This TED presentation explored how an ongoing longitudinal interview project with parents and guardians of students with disabilities was conducted and how it impacted preservice teachers' listening skills. Information was presented about the meaningful and sustainable integration of research participants into classes and the multiple benefits for the research participants, preservice teachers, and teacher educators.

Background/Rationale

The significance of the topic lies in recognizing listening as a foundational skill crucial for effective communication, relationship-building, and empathetic understanding. Our presentation showcases the impact of integrating longitudinal research into teacher preparation programs, specifically focusing on enhancing preservice teachers' listening skills. By involving preservice teachers in reviewing past interview transcripts and engaging in new interviews with parents or guardians of students with disabilities, we initiated a process of reflection and learning. These adjustments have not only created a synergistic opportunity but also provided valuable lessons learned. Over the past seven years, our collaboration with parents and guardians has empowered them to contribute to the professional growth of preservice teachers while providing preservice teachers with another avenue to receive valuable feedback. Ultimately, our presentation underscores the impact of incorporating research-driven practices, fostering reflective learning, and nurturing authentic connections between educators and the communities they serve. Additionally, this presentation offers productive outcomes for students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds. Parents and guardians participating in the research represent varied economic and cultural contexts, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences are considered. Insights gleaned from this research will be shared to facilitate broader understanding and inclusivity in educational practices. Participants will also have the opportunity to share additional suggestions or questions related to the topic, fostering a collaborative and inclusive learning environment that respects the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Key Session Takeaways

Research Question 1 (RQ1): To what extent will a nationwide sample of parents or guardians of students with disabilities, educators, and preservice teachers (PSTs) participate in ongoing survey work and interviews?

- In the first year, 413 participants completed Qualtrics surveys, including 138 parents or guardians, 244 special education teachers, and 31 general education teachers
- Over five years, 45 PSTs enrolled in a special education course on collaboration and transition participated during one of the six semesters the course was offered.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): After engaging in the class project, what importance did preservice teachers (PSTs) place on listening as measured by four questions from the four Vickers & Minke Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale (PTRS-II) (Vickers & Minke, 1995)?

Importance Placed on Active Listening-Related Actions: PSTs Self-Report

	Not at all n (%)	Slightly n (%)	Moderately n (%)	Very n (%)	Extremely n (%)
Be active and resourceful in seeking to understand how their student's context.	0/45 (0%)	0/45 (0%)	2/45 (4%)	13/45 (29%)	30/45 (67%)
Encourage parents to ask questions throughout the school year.	0/45 (0%)	0/45 (0%)	1/45 (2%)	18/45 (40%)	26/45 (58%)
Engage in positive conversations with parents - listen and share students' unique strengths.	0/45 (0%)	0/45 (0%)	1/45 (2%)	6/45 (13%)	38/45 (84%)
Having parents/caregivers offer ALTERNATIVE TEACHING suggestions and using some or all of them.	0/45 (0%)	1/45 (2%)	9/45 (20%)	18/45 (40%)	17/45 (37%)

Other Key Takeaways.

- Nationwide participants for this work were solicited via Facebook posts, CEC discussion boards, and a Wisconsin Transition Services Listserv
- Originally, one PST was paired with one parent or special education teacher. During the second iteration of the project, PSTs were paired. PSTs indicated this was a positive change as it allowed them to better engage in a critical analysis of the information that had been shared prior to sharing it with the class.
- During the third iteration, and while reviewing their audio files, I noticed that PSTs were not fully engaging in effective listening practices. This has resulted in the exploration of other listening frameworks such as Bullough's (2023) Manners of Democracy.

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FORGE AHEAD: AI'S IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PERSONNEL PREPARATION

Abstract

Multiple factors (legislative, ideological, financial/resources, research, etc.) have significantly influenced special education teacher preparation programs over the past decades. This evolution includes transitioning from categorical licensures to non-categorial licensures to an emphasis on teaching grade level standards (Brownell et al., 2010). Given the lack of content area coursework within the special education preparation programs, other models such as coteaching were emphasized to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Furthermore, due to a shortage of special education teachers and other factors, many states have started adopting dual licensure programs to address the needs of students with disabilities in the general education settings. (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Sindelar et al., 2019). In this presentation, the advantages and disadvantages of dual licensure programs, and the potential impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in supporting the needs of general education/special education teachers was discussed.

Background/Rationale

The field of special education is constantly evolving to positively impact the lives of students with disabilities since its inception. Some of recent practices include (a) an emphasis on highly qualified teachers for teaching content to all students, (b) an emphasis on linking IEP goals to grade level standards and assessing students on grade level assessments, (c) the application of unified/RtI frameworks, and (d) synthesis and dissemination of effective instructional practices (for example, Marzano et al.'s nine practices and the CEEDAR Center and Council for Exceptional Children's 22 HLP practices). Some of the above practices also led to adoption of dual licensure/certification in Ohio and other states (Kirksey & Lloydhauser, 2022). The nature of any dual licensure program calls for mastering content knowledge, learning different pedagogical practices, and specific organizational/legal requirements. The enormity of the knowledge and skills that dual licensure teacher candidates are required to acquire in a limited timeframe could impact the quality of teacher preparation and therefore the quality of education for students with disabilities. Furthermore, very little is known about the content and quality of existing dual licensure programs, or the additional tasks performed by dual licensed teachers in schools. Recent developments in AI technology provides an opportunity to examine how these technologies can be channeled to adequately prepare all teachers candidates, including dual licensed teachers. A proactive approach is needed to understand the impact of these technologies on pre-service personnel preparation in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Key Session Takeaways

Dual License Programs

There is very little information/research on dual licensure programs. The curricular coursework available online for these programs is vague and very diverse. This could be partly due to the different state policies, college resources, and licensure areas. For example, not only is the length of the programs varies, but also the knowledge-based skills targeted in the programs. It is essential to identify essential "engaged knowledge" that should be addressed in dual licensure programs. In this regard, HLP practices should be very useful but not sufficient. Some additional knowledge and skills of focus should include an in-depth understanding of law, characteristics, accommodations, principles of designing instruction, the special educational process, development of IEPs and transition plans, and administration of various assessments (depending on the licensure area). Furthermore, not much is known about the impact of the programs on teachers and students (with and without disabilities) especially at the middle and secondary grades. This is some research at the elementary grades. For example, Kirksey and Lloydhauser (2022) reported that dual certified KG-second grade teachers had more positive dispositions and their students with disabilities did better in math. Further research is need on the effectiveness of dual license programs at the middle and secondary levels (and in various academic content areas). Also, future investigations should focus on the efficient mechanisms for integration of knowledge and skills among IHE faculty, mentor teaches, field supervisors, edTPA requirements etc.

Challenges and opportunities

A major challenge of dual licensure programs is that a large, diverse amount of knowledge and skills must be acquired by the teacher candidates. They should also be provided an opportunity to develop fluency within the same time frame/credit hours. Further, states mandate additional requirements, for example, Science of Reading coursework in Ohio, that must be met. The current framework prevents meaningful opportunities for mastery and generalization of skills. This lack of knowledge-based skill mastery might increase the attrition rates of teachers and their quality of teaching. One way to address some of the challenges is with AI tools. It is also well known that the students regularly use AI tools. Given AI's potential, it should be harnessed. For teacher candidates, it can save time with developing products and thus reduce stress. For example, AI tools can help with (a) developing appropriate accommodations, (b) application of theory, (c) developing lesson plans, (d) generating ideas for IEPs, (e) identifying behavioral strategies, (f) grading assistance, and (g) with creating assessments to meet the needs of individual needs. For teacher educators, AI can be both harnessed and incorporated in the courses. Some example tools include Magic School, ChatGPT, LessonUP, Smart Sparrow, and IEP Generator. With the above tools, instructors can create a range of case vignettes, create scoring rubrics that aligns and evaluates students' responses to what they learned in the course, and undertake activities where students are evaluating products generated by AI using content learned in the course. The potential benefits of AI include easier access to content, reduced time on creating products, a shift in focus to skill development and student learning, obtaining real time assistance, and retention of diverse students.

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EVALUATING TEACHING PRACTICE IN TIERED INSTRUCTION USING AN OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Abstract

Accurately measuring instructional practice in tiered instruction is imperative; yet intricacies associated with providing such instruction make it difficult. To address the challenges, this study evaluated validity evidence for a researcher-developed observation protocol designed to measure general and special educators' use of effective instructional principles and evidence-based practice in tiered reading instruction. Kane's validity framework (2006) was employed to examine whether (a) the scoring rule functioned as intended, (b) scores represented teachers' instructional quality across different sources of variance, and (c) scores are related to another construct that is believed to comprise teaching quality. This study provides multiple sources of validity evidence (e.g., Generalizability theory, multi-faceted Rasch models) to confirm essential aspects of effective special education instruction in the protocol. Findings demonstrate the need for combining different approaches to measurement in order to assess the impact of a professional development program from improving tiered reading instruction on teachers' instructional practice.

Background/Rationale

Professional development (PD) efforts that target evidence-based instruction in multi-tiered instructional (MTSS) frameworks require protocols for assessing teacher learning that can be employed across different teaching strategies and instructional arrangements (e.g., Tier 1 versus Tier 2 Instruction). In MTSS, general education teachers provide Tier 1 (i.e., evidence-based instruction to all students) combined with Tier 2 instruction (i.e., supplemental instruction to at-risk students). For students with disabilities, who need additional instructional support, special education teachers provide Tier 3 intensive, individualized instruction in addition to that which is provided in Tier 1 instruction. Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction should focus on evidence-based practices (EBPs) that complement but may not be the same as the EBPs provided in Tier 1

instruction, as general and special education teachers may implement different EBPs, designed to achieve the same curricular goals, depending on students' varied needs. Many existing observation protocols have not been constructed to capture different proportions of EBPs that general and special education teachers might provide during MTSS instruction, and simultaneously provide comparable metrics of instruction to establish the efficacy of PD efforts aimed at improving MTSS instruction.

This validity study is part of a larger Goal II Development Study, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, to assess the effectiveness of collaborative PD for improving the tiered instruction of general and special education teachers. Researchers in the PD study were interested in a measure of instructional practice that could: (a) be used as a common metric of instruction for general and special education teachers, (b) identify if teachers were using practices learned, and (c) assess the quality of EBP implementation at each tier. To accomplish these measurement goals, the research team adopted the Preservice Observation Instrument for Special Education (POISE; Pua et al., 2021). The modified tool, Tool for Implementing and Evaluating Research-Based Evidence in Differentiated Tiered Instruction (TIERED), was designed to measure three aspects of teachers' instruction: (a) use of content agnostic instructional practices that supported implementation of EBPs (e.g., modeling, feedback), (b) quality with which teachers deployed these content-agnostic practices, and (c) time spent using intervention specific EBPs taught in the PD (e.g., decoding, summarization).

Kane's validity framework (2006) provides guidelines for gathering evidence for four inferences: (a) scoring inference – scores represent desired instructional behaviors, and scoring rules are applied accurately and consistently, (b) generalization inference –scores represent a teacher's teaching quality across a variety of sources of variance (e.g., different raters/tiers/content areas), (c) extrapolation inference – scores for an observation tool predict other measures of teaching quality (e.g., student outcomes), and (d) implication inference – changes in scores from the instrument appropriately represent the efficacy of the PD intervention. Researchers have used Kane's framework to assess the validity of observation protocols in general and special education (Hill et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2020; Pua et al., 2021). This study specifically focuses on evaluating the scoring and generalization inferences. This analytical approach was used to address the following research questions:

1. Does the scoring scale function appropriately as intended?
2. To what degree does each facet contribute to the variance in Likert scores?
3. Do scores on the observation protocol correlate with teacher knowledge measures?

Key Session Takeaways

Forty-three fourth-grade general and special education teachers from 15 schools (8 treatment, 7 control) in the Southwestern United States participated in a larger PD study.

Results

Findings from the multi-faceted Rasch model (MRFM) analysis and the Generalizability study (G-study) support each other. First, high separation statistics for the teacher facet in the MRFM analysis are aligned with G-study findings that show a significant portion of variance attributed

to the teacher component (12.7%). Moreover, an interaction effect found in the G-study showed a high proportion of variation associated with lessons nested within teachers (32%), suggesting teachers might implement target practices (e.g., explanation, feedback) differently across comprehension and word analysis – findings reinforced by high separation statistics for the content facet in the MRFM analysis. Second, the G-study found the variance contributed by a teacher by rater interaction was higher than that contributed by the teacher component (14.6% versus 12.7%). Even though the G-study showed small variance for the rater facet (5.0%), a high level of separation was found in the MRFM analysis. Logit scores showed that some raters consistently were strict in applying scores and others were lenient. Third, the G-study showed a negligible amount of variance attributable to tiers (0.8%), suggesting teachers were scored in a consistent manner across instructional tiers. In the MRFM analysis, a significant but small proportion of the variance in the tier facet ($p < 0.001$ in a $\chi 2$ test, $G = 2.13$) supports results of the G-study. Logit scores show teachers' demonstration of Likert behaviors were lower in Tier 1 than Tiers 2 and 3. Lastly, findings from the G-study indicated that variation associated with domains was low (7.6%).

Discussion

Findings from our study advance the field's knowledge about how to measure tiered instruction across general and special education and show that validity evidence can be used to improve tool development. Results demonstrate that there are common aspects of instruction that can be measured successfully when teachers implement EBPs at different tiers, and these practices are considered essential to effective instruction for students with disabilities. Further, teachers' level of knowledge about those practices and the quality of their implementation are highly correlated, suggesting that practitioners can improve general and special education teachers' implementation of instruction by focusing on knowledge for instruction and use of effective instructional principles (e.g., explicit instruction). However, there are limitations to measuring content agnostic practices as the only indicator of teacher change. Tiers and subdomains of instruction may influence how teachers implement content agnostic practices; thus, our results suggest further exploration is needed. Further analysis of data generated from the interval portion of our instrument might shed light on teachers' use of content agonistic practices in different tiers and for different subdomains of content, and how they might change in response to PD.

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KEYNOTE PRESENTATION: FORGING INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Abstract

Founders of The Aletheia Society, Drs. Bill Therrien and Bryan Cook, provided an overview of the work and mission of the Aletheia Society to the members of the Teacher Education Division (TED) via their keynote presentation. They shared the rationale that drove the formation of this society and provided an example of a successful partnership with teacher educator, Dr. Shannon Budin. The four focus areas of Aletheia Society include academic publishing; large-scale and systematic research collaborations; vetted, research-based professional development; and unconferences featuring hackathons in which participant collaborate on a product. To start, TED members were invited to attend a TED and Aletheia Unconference Collaboration during the conference followed by a call to leverage collective action to drive transformative change in special education.

Background/Rationale

The field of special education has come a long way over the past 50-years to improve disability awareness, equal access, and inclusion. These improvements took bold action on the part of many- including everyday citizens, legislators, researchers, and advocates. At the close of 2024, we once again find ourselves poised for action as we consider the need to defend core values, act with courage and vision, and collaborate for impact to ensure our changing political and economic landscape does not diminish the rights founded under IDEA and ADA. Challenges such as teacher shortages (Bettini & Gilmour, 2024), non-democratic approaches to setting research agendas and grant allocation decisions, limited collaboration amongst researchers, use of evidence-based practices, and access to open access quality research are a few of the reasons The Aletheia Society was formed.

The Aletheia Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing special education through the collaborative efforts of researchers, educators, and other stakeholders with the goal of democratizing special education research, working toward meaningful improvements in services for children with disabilities. The Society has several focus areas that are well aligned to the work of TED and invites TED to work together to meet our moment for transformative change.

Key Session Takeaways

The Aletheia Society seeks opportunities for collaboration within and across the field of special education, specifically with TED membership through the following initiatives.

Publication Opportunities: The open-access journal, *Research in Special Education (RiSE),* provides opportunity for TED and Aletheia publication partnerships. This journal recognizes and supports open practices such as data and materials as well as preregistration. The journal could potentially include a section dedicated to research in teacher preparation and opportunities for mentorship of early career researchers through the review process. The journal editors encourage the translation of research to practice by encouraging equal and critical partnerships between researchers and practitioners (Belfiore & Lee, 2024).

Crowdsourced Research Opportunities: The Special Education Research Accelerator (SERA) is a platform for conducting crowdsourced studies related to special education. In collaboration with TED, SERA seeks to promote an inclusive and democratic approach to planning and conducting a research agenda on special education teacher preparation that can ultimately help improve our practices and provide us with comprehensive data to advocate for our field

Professional Development: The Aletheia Society harnesses the expertise of researchers to improve professional development and help address the research-to-practice gap. By engaging a wide range of experts, the professional development can be comprehensive, up-to-date, and relevant. The society can help address the business side of PD (processes, advertisement, promotion, etc.) while maintaining high quality.

Unconferences: These unconventional conferences are participant-oriented meetings with informal and flexible programs that emphasize collaborative work and minimize lecture-style presentations while emphasizing engagement and collaboration (Budd et al., 2015).

Additional Resources

- The Aletheia Society https://aletheia-society.org/
- Research in Special Education (RiSE) journal https://aletheia-society.org/alethia-society-journal/
- Special Education Research Accelerator https://edresearchaccelerator.org/

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DISABILITY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY: NEUROAFFIRMING TEACHER EDUCATION BASED ON THE INSIGHTS OF NEURODIVERSE ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS

Abstract

This session presented a stance, terminology, and practice for educating disabled and non-disabled students that honors disability identities as cultural and a form of diversity worthy of sustaining. Through two neurodiverse elementary educators' narratives, we shared principles of Disability Sustaining Pedagogy (DSP) and how it can be fostered in teacher education.

Background/Rationale

Paris (2012) presented 'Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy," (CSP), which reinforced tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) to include research and teaching approaches that support the "value of our multiethnic and multilingual present and future" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 93). CSP has been cross-pollinated with Universal Design for Learning (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016), a framework for designing instruction that is challenging and accessible for all students.

Building on scholarship in Disability Studies in Education (DSE), Disability Sustaining Pedagogy (DSP) is a counterpart to CSP (Rabinowitz et al., 2024). DSP involves supporting students in identifying role models and building communities with other disabled individuals - including teachers with disabilities. DSP attends to gaining access to dominant ways of knowing and being, while simultaneously supporting nondisabled students with access to disabled ways of knowing and being; in other words, gaining disability cultural competence. DSP challenges deficit notions of disabled individuals and disability cultures, without essentializing disability identities. DSP explicitly draws on and values the intuition, knowledge, and lived experiences of disabled individuals.

We implemented narrative inquiry methods (Chase, 2011) to counter the history of research *about* individuals with disabilities that did not include the perspectives of disabled individuals themselves (Valente & Danforth, 2016). Storying highlighted for teachers how their strengths as educators are connected to their strengths as individuals with disabilities.

Key Session Takeaways

Educators with disabilities, including neurodiverse educators, have expertise cultivated through their experiences strategically maneuvering classrooms and curricula (Vogel & Sharoni, 2011). They leverage their experiences to reimagine instruction. The neurodivergent paradigm operates based on the following: (1) "neurodiversity is a natural and valuable form of human diversity," (2) "the idea that there is one type of neurotypical mind is a culturally constructed fiction," and (3) "neurodiversity acts as a source of creative potential" (Farahar, 2020).

A focus on neurodiversity is essential since research finds that educational staff who work with students with disabilities are more biased towards common forms of neurodivergence such as ADHD than other disabilities like sensory ones (Druckman et al., 2021).

DSP offers counter-narratives (Burns et al., 2013), resisting the shame and stigma that are often associated with disability identities, especially disabled teachers. Instead, these stories offer examples of pride and expertise from classroom teachers themselves: in the language of the disability rights movement, "nothing about us, without us" (Charlton, 2000). Learning from both the supports and barriers they have encountered, their knowledge becomes a tool to imagine instruction differently, as pedagogy that is actively anti-ableist.

Teacher educators can use the expertise of neurodiverse teachers through analysis and application of DSP in preparation coursework as well as examining their own identities and current practices in classrooms. DSP makes clear that both people with disabilities and people without disabilities can teach based on the knowledge built from experiences of people with disabilities. Exploring DSP and the stories of neurodiverse educators supports the recognition and dismantling of deficit models in their visions of teaching and learning.

Figure 1. *Principles of Disability Sustaining Pedagogy (DSP)*

Identity: the lived experiences that make each individual unique
Relationships: the collaboration and community of those working for disability justice
Criticality: the ability to read the world for power and perspective
Cultural Competence: learning about your own culture(s) and the cultures of others
Academic Growth: the development of skills, strategies, and content knowledge
Permeability: connects content and community engagement, specifically communities of and for disabled people

Additional Resources

- Tondreau, A. & Rabinowitz, L. (2024). *Sustaining Cultural and Disability Identities in the Literacy Classroom, K-6.* Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Sustaining-Cultural-and-Disability-Identities-in-the-Literacy-Classroom-K-6/Tondreau-Rabinowitz/p/book/9781032247991

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FORGING AHEAD WITH YEAR 3 BY RECRUITING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN OHIO

Abstract

The Ohio Unit of CEC is in its third year of a partnership with the Ohio Office of Exceptional Children to retain early career teachers. This session focused on year three and recruiting participants before they graduated to receive premium membership and a veteran teacher as mentor.

Background/Rationale

Teachers are leaving the classroom for a variety of reasons, one of which is self-reported as a lack of classroom support. CEC-Ohio and the Ohio Office of Exceptional Children are working together to increase teacher retention by providing support through professional membership in CEC and non-evaluative mentoring to new teachers. Mentoring programs are not new to CEC, nor the need for them (Hopkins, 2018 ; Maready et al., 2021; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). Consequently, this topic is especially pertinent to consider for preservice teachers from a variety of backgrounds including the undeserved and under-resourced, to expose them early to the benefits of CEC membership while also providing mentor support. The intended outcome of this session was for participants to return to their institution with ideas for immediate implementation.

The program is titled the “New Teacher Institute” (NTI), and the first two years of mentoring and membership with first and second year teachers have resulted in measured successes of participant comfort and knowledge in their positions. Year three is now forging ahead and began recruiting in the spring to prepare for the fall. Discussion included the details of planning and recruiting. Funding to purchase the memberships and give mentors & mentees a stipend to attend the national convention have been covered by a grant from the Ohio Office of Exceptional Children. The funding from the grant is discretionary director funds from IDEA part B; a fitting synergy with the goal of providing services for children with an identified disability.

Interest in the teaching profession among high school students and college freshmen has fallen 38% since 2020, reaching the lowest level in the last 50 years (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). In the last five years alone, there has been over a 35% decline in enrollment among teacher preparation programs, foreshadowing an even larger shortage to come (Dias-Lacey & Guirguis, 2017). The pipeline of new teachers continues to be limited, while the current climate in P-12 education is

simultaneously challenging (Matthews et al., 2017; Scott et al., 2023). In addition to a decrease in teacher candidates, a recent American Federation of Teachers study found that almost 40% of member teachers would leave the profession in the next two years (AFT, 2022). CEC-Ohio and the Ohio Office of Exceptional Children are working together to increase teacher retention by providing support through professional membership in CEC and non-evaluative mentoring to new teachers.

Key Session Takeaways

Considerable time and energy are being spent on the shortage of teachers around the country, including special education and the fact that as many as 30% leave the field within the first three years. The Ohio initiative to retain teachers by providing support with mentoring and CEC membership is an innovative way to forge ahead with a concrete solution. The session included a description of the first two years and incorporating pre-service teachers for the third year.

Implications for practice include educator preparation programs, new teachers from under-represented groups, and future research that seeks to increase special educator longevity. Discussion will include survey design and response rate, quality of mentors based on survey responses, perceived impact of mentoring based on mentee survey responses, and suggestions for final survey questioning.

Figure 1. *Recruiting Numbers and Changes Made by Cohort*

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RESPONDING TO DISPARITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATION PERSONNEL PREPARATION

Abstract

Interdisciplinary collaboration is critical to effective service delivery for students with disabilities. However, collaborative models are not the norm in personnel preparation programs. In this presentation, authors discussed an ongoing innovative OSEP-funded project that brings together scholars from a bilingual special education program and an ABA and Autism studies program.

Background/Rationale

Interdisciplinary collaboration is critical to effective service delivery for students with disabilities including those with autism. Moreover, it is mandated by the law. Specifically, the individuals with disabilities act (IDEA) clearly articulates the requirement for a team approach to decision-making (Yell et al., 2006). Additionally, collaboration is embedded in the BCBA's ethics code. Yet, collaborative models are not the norm in personnel training programs. This means that most special education professionals (e.g. Special education teachers and BCBAs) are trained in silos but are expected to work collaboratively once they are in the field.

On the other hand, the demographics of students attending public schools have become increasingly diverse in recent years. Specifically, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2022) data indicate that of the 49.6 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in Fall 2022, 44% were white, 29% were Hispanic, 15% were Black, 5.5% were Asian, and 5% identified as two or more races. This means that over 50% of students enrolled in public school are non-white. However, 80% of the current teaching force is consists of white teachers. Moreover, nationally, only 18% of special educators are teachers of color, while almost 50% of students with disabilities are students of color. Similar trends have been observed across most states (Bettini et al., 2018). The field of ABA is not immune to these disparities; the 2024 BCBA data indicate that 54% of Board-certified practitioners are white, compared to 25% Hispanic, 13% Black, and about 7% Asian.

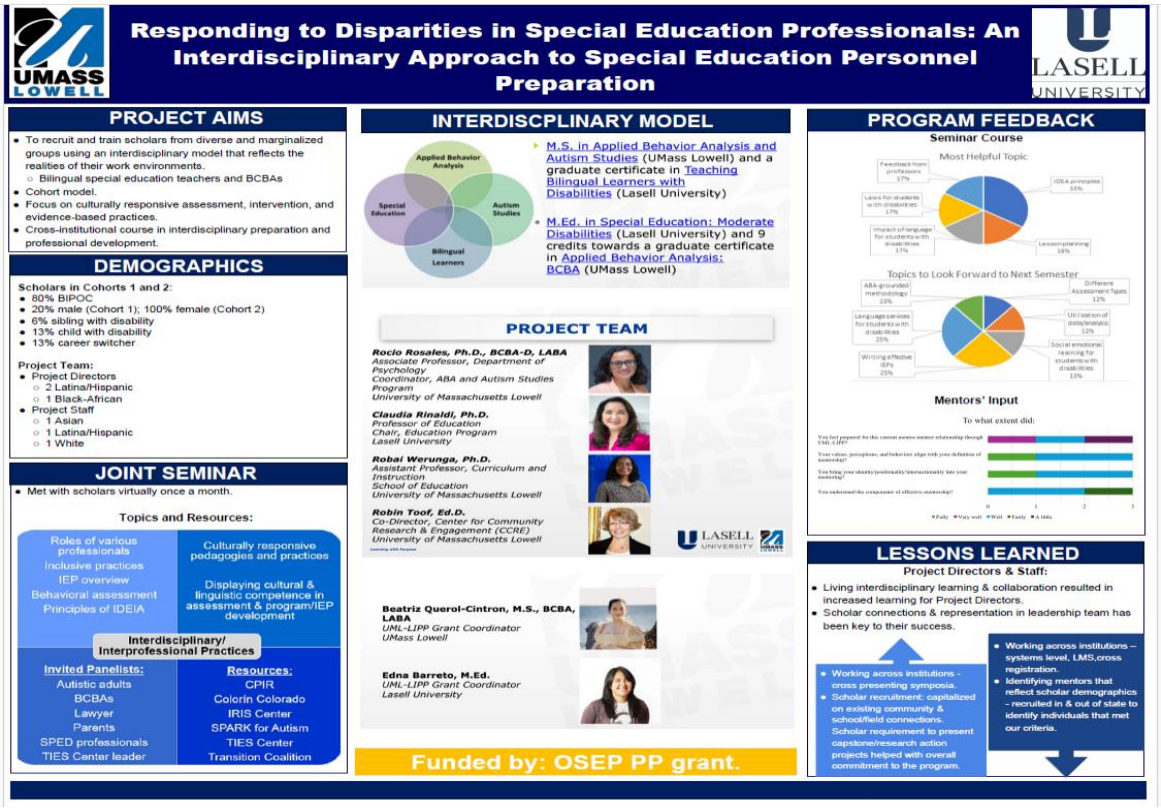
Considering the preceding statistics, in this presentation, authors discussed an ongoing innovative OSEP-funded project that brings together graduate scholars from a bilingual special

education program and an ABA and Autism studies program. Specifically, authors discussed the structure of the cohort model that incorporates two distinct programs as well as how the project attempts to address the issue of underrepresentation of personnel from diverse backgrounds in the two fields (i.e., special education and applied behavior analysis). The project directors have focused on recruitment of diverse candidates as one of their absolute priorities; to date, 80% of the scholars enrolled in the programs are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Authors also discussed successes of the project thus far, and some challenges and lessons learned along the way.

Key Session Takeaways

Interdisciplinary collaboration is critical to effective service delivery for students with disabilities and is mandated by the law. Therefore, to ensure effective collaboration among practitioners, special education personnel preparation programs must strive to find innovative approaches to recruit and train a diverse body of candidates across disciplines that support these students (e.g., special education, general education, BCBA, speech and language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy etc.) alongside each other. Such approaches, where they exist, have the potential to instill and promote the virtue and value of collaboration among these professionals I advance of their working alongside each other on students' IEP teams. The program discussed provides a model for how interdisciplinary SEPP in higher education.

Figure 1. S*ummary of the interdisciplinary program discussed in the session*.



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CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUPPORTING PRE-SERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS

Abstract

This article is designed to provide a forum for discussing resources and strategies for implementing and sustaining special education paraprofessional to teacher programs. Considerations and recommendations for effectively implementing paraprofessional to teacher programs and sustaining a Grow Your Own (GYO) personnel preparation program for special education undergraduate students will be discussed.

Background/Rationale

The nationwide shortage of special education teachers, as highlighted by Peyton (2021), demands urgent attention due to its significant impact on the quality of education for students with disabilities (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Brownell et al., 2018). To address this crisis, innovative solutions such as GYO programs have been developed to recruit and support local community members, like paraprofessionals, in obtaining degrees and licenses in special education (Madda & Schultz, 2009). Flexible teacher preparation programs have proven essential in equipping educators to meet the dynamic demands of modern classrooms (Knipe, 2016).

Research highlights the potential of innovative licensure pathways to diversify and expand the special education teacher workforce (Sayman et al., 2018). However, there is limited research on which elements of these programs effectively enhance teachers' ability to implement evidence-based practices (Kee, 2012; Myers et al., 2020). Without sufficient support in classroom settings, teachers from accelerated programs may face challenges in delivering effective interventions for diverse learners (Conderman et al., 2022). High-quality practicum experiences and strong mentorship are critical for preparing future special education teachers (Conderman et al., 2022; Dreer, 2021).

Effective mentorship, characterized by open communication and emotional support, significantly impacts teacher candidates' success, job satisfaction, and retention (Izadinia, 2016). Thoughtful development of mentor-mentee relationships is essential to fostering teacher readiness and addressing attrition in special education.

Key Session Takeaways

A review of an accelerated pathway to licensure program revealed several key themes identified by students during focus group discussions. Participants emphasized the importance of diversity awareness, culturally responsive teaching practices, and assessment-driven decision-making as critical components for program success. They also highlighted the value of bridging their professional experience with new learning opportunities. However, students expressed concerns about time constraints hindering foundational learning, addressing individual student needs through differentiated instruction, and providing sufficient behavioral and socio-emotional support. The focus groups underscored the need for opportunities, the removal of barriers, and financial compensation as pivotal factors for success in the accelerated program at University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). These elements helped students navigate the program more effectively. To ensure continued success, the program must establish robust academic, social, and financial support structures, enabling students to meet program requirements and thrive in a higher education environment.

To effectively support pre-service teachers in special education programs, a cohesive and flexible approach is essential. Establishing a cohort model fosters a sense of community and shared purpose among candidates, supported by dedicated faculty and a program coordinator who serves as a central point of contact. Collaboration between faculty, advising centers, and school districts ensures seamless alignment between coursework and real-world application, with a logical progression through courses and structured practicum experiences.

Flexibility plays a critical role in meeting the diverse needs of pre-service teachers. Accommodations such as flexible due dates, opportunities for resubmitting assignments to demonstrate mastery, and options for completing assignments in multiple formats (e.g., videos, written work) create an inclusive learning environment. Accessible resources, such as subtitles, eBooks, audiobooks, templates, and rubrics, further support diverse learners.

Offering paid opportunities during practicum and student teaching, combined with accelerated pathways and concierge-style services, reduces barriers for candidates balancing work, personal responsibilities, and education. Training for faculty and adjuncts ensures high-quality instruction, while engaging strategies like discussions, case studies, and real-life examples help bridge theory and practice.

By valuing candidates' existing experience, fostering strong mentor relationships, and creating accessible, supportive, and engaging programs, these recommendations aim to prepare pre-service teachers to meet the dynamic demands of special education classrooms effectively.

Additional Resources

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