

Chapter 1

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Training for Pre-Service Special Educators in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

In the field of public education, special education teacher preparation is one of the most critical areas of teacher preparation in higher education, given the mandate of FAPE under the IDEA. Additionally, teacher preparation programming that provides pre-service teachers with the knowledge, skills, and clinical experiences that can meet the learning-diverse needs of students is of paramount importance. However, teacher preparation programs often focus on meeting accreditation standards, job placement and service opportunities while leaving the teaching of diversity in special education as an add-on to be fulfilled by service departments, humanities courses, and/or social science electives. In order for universities and institutions of higher education to fulfill its mandate of teacher-training in special education, with a focus beyond the disability, they must adopt a curricula revision that includes culturally responsive teaching and diversity.

INTRODUCTION

Training special education pre-service teachers at the University level requires a framework whereby students with disabilities are viewed as learning-diverse through a culturally responsive and inclusive lens. Pre-service special education teachers must adopt a posture of critical understanding, appreciation for difference and a culture of inclusiveness that engenders the family, community and the unique learning and behavioral needs of the students that they will teach (Bleicher, 2011; Robertson, McFarland, Sciuchetti, & Garcia, 2017; Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009). However, universities often remove culturally responsive teaching from special education teaching programs assuming that the Individual

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Education Plan (IEP) and related services under the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) will drive instruction (Deno et al., 2009; Fuchs et al, 2003).

Björn, Aro, Koponen, Fuchs and Fuchs (2016) suggest that special education has a long history of seeking its own place within education systems and this impacts how teachers are trained. The authors maintain that there is a need to look into its many roles within school systems since as we move forward as a more diverse and inclusive world – we must also develop support service frameworks for all students. Hence, policymakers and people working in the field of education must support students within our ever growing and diverse student and parent population. At a macro level of education, and on an ideological level, all students should be able to study and have access to highly flexible support frameworks in their local schools and in their natural learning environments (p. 1).

Scott (2017) maintains that teaching pre-service special education teachers early behavior management and modification strategies is also important. However, universities often focus on text-book strategies that are not all inclusive of the population of students and communities that require out-of-the-box behavior management interventions. Culturally responsive behavior management, inclusive of home, community and across-school collaboration is key in minimizing the behavior gaps that impact students with special education needs who are also from diverse backgrounds. Scott (2017) maintains that using an evidence-based practice approach in K-12 classrooms is important. Evidence-based practices (EBP) are characteristically defined as using data to guide decisions about selecting, using, and assessing the effects of interventions on student learning and outcomes.

Kurniawati, De Boer, Minnaert and Mangunsong (2017) suggest that a number of researchers have revealed that teachers play a significant role in educating students with special education needs. Globally teacher's roles are reflective through teachers' attitudes that are important in relation to effective inclusive education. Teachers who are favorably disposed at the pre-service teaching level to inclusive education tend to be more willing to use effective teaching strategies, whereas teachers with less positive attitudes can undermine the efforts of inclusion without being aware of the importance of culturally responsive teaching (Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010). Research on teachers' attitudes, however, has shown mixed results. Kurniawati (et al., 2017) also found that in practice, teachers in that study had serious reservations about inclusive education. It has been argued that such attitudes relate to teachers' lack of competence and confidence in teaching students with various types of special needs.

This chapter suggest that students with identified specific learning disabilities benefit from rigorous and goal-centered instruction driven by their present levels of academic and functional performance (PLAAFP) and learning goals. In addition, culturally inclusive family collaboration that has as its core culturally responsive teaching (CRT) pedagogy beyond the disability is also essential. This pedagogy must be interwoven with consistent and culturally responsive family and community collaboration. Culturally responsive teaching entails a process inclusive of understanding students who have identified learning and other disabilities served under the IDEA and who also present with various needs that require specialized instruction by the classroom teacher (Rossetti, Sauer, Bui, & Ou, 2017).

CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Teaching special education entails teaching students who have been identified with unique needs in order to increase their academic achievement, social/life skills, and character (Ford, Staurt & Shernavaz, 2014). Much of this instruction is driven by specific goals found in the student's IEP. The role of special

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