

Chapter 4

Advancing Teacher Candidates' Capabilities for Differentiated Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This chapter illustrates pedagogical practices from an undergraduate educational psychology course focused on preparing preservice teacher candidates for inclusive education in grades 7-12 general classes. First, literature related to teacher preparation for multi-tiered inclusive education is reviewed. Next, an inclusive instructional project is showcased to pinpoint pedagogical approaches used for promoting preservice teacher candidates' capabilities for differentiated instruction and technology-enhanced instruction in general education. Finally, implications of pedagogical practices for promoting preservice teacher candidates' aptitude for teaching diverse students via differentiated instruction are discussed, and future research directions for examining effectiveness of teacher preparation in general education for inclusive education are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

In 2018-2019, 7.1 million (i.e., 14 percent) of all students in public schools, ages 3-21, received special education services under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States. In fall 2018, among all students ages 6-21 served under IDEA, 64 percent spent 80 percent or more of their time inside

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general classes in regular schools, 18 percentage spent 40 to 79 percent of the school day inside general classes, and 13 percentage spent less than 40 percent of their time inside general classes. The percentage of students served under IDEA who spent most of the school day inside general classes was 88% of students with speech or language impairments, 72 percent specific learning disabilities, 68 percent visual impairments, 67 percent other health impairments, 66 percent developmental delays, 63 percent hearing impairments, 17 percent intellectual disabilities and 14 percent multiple disabilities (Hussar, et al., 2020). This suggests that future teachers have to be appropriately prepared to teach P-12 students with disabilities in general classes.

With revision to the IDEA, general education teachers are now expected to integrate educational interventions, such as the widely adopted model, Response to Intervention (RtI), as a preventative measure for addressing inappropriate identification and disproportionate placement of academically struggling students in special education. Prior to initiation of RtI and Inclusion as pedagogical approaches for attending to the learning needs of students at risk of academic failure, special education teachers were charged with the responsibility of screening, assessing, and educating students with disabilities (Barrio & Combes, 2015). Currently, however, such responsibilities have shifted to now include general education teachers, thereby ushering in the practice of inclusive education and collaboration between general education and special education (Zagona et al., 2017). Preservice teachers who are prepared to teach in general education, however, express concern about their aptitude for operationalizing RtI in their classes as an approach for differentiating instruction and attending to the learning needs of all students, including those at risk for special education referral (Barrio & Combes, 2015). Findings from the Stites et al. (2018) study indicated that preservice teachers often lacked thorough understanding of inclusion and were of the position that additional preparation was needed in order for them to teach effectively in an inclusive setting. "Teacher preparation programs therefore need to provide a more coherent conceptual framework to guide the enhancement of both course and field work related to inclusion and effective inclusive practices" (p 21).

This chapter exhibits pedagogical practice from an educational psychology course geared towards preservice teacher candidates' preparation for inclusive education in 7-12 grade classes. First, literature related to preservice teacher candidates' preparation for inclusive education is reviewed. Specifically, the *Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)* is reviewed to pinpoint a trajectory for advancing preservice teacher candidates' aptitude for educating diverse students in inclusive classes. Next, the process of engaging preservice teacher candidates in the development and demonstration of technology-enhanced and differentiated instruction for implementing inclusive education in 7-12 grade general classes is showcased. Finally, implications of pedagogical approaches for promoting preservice teacher candidates' propensity for teaching 7-12 grade diverse students via inclusive educational methods as well

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