Preface

Instilling a belief that all children can learn is a common goal of teacher education programs. Research suggests however that teachers feel ill-prepared to support students in the inclusive classroom (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhove, 2006). Teacher education programs may grapple with meaningfully incorporating inclusion practices and positively shaping teachers’ attitudes about students with exceptionalities (also called diverse learners). When new teachers enter the classroom, they bring with them personal experiences, beliefs, and attitudes that shape instructional choices, interactions with students, and beliefs about the learner. Teacher expectations are strongly correlated to student achievement. As such, what a teacher believes about a student may become the expected outcome, and this is true for students with disabilities as well (Hampton & Mason, 2003).

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), mandates public schools which receive federal funds to provide equal access to education for all children regardless of disability. Schools must evaluate students with disabilities and create an Individualized Education Program (IEP) with parental input, in order to educate students in the least restrictive environment (LRE), with the first educational placement consideration being a general classroom setting. Today, 57% of students with disabilities spend more than 80% of their day in general education classrooms, yet general education teachers consistently report that they do not have the skills they need to effectively instruct diverse learners, including students with disabilities. (Blanton et al., 2011).

A few years ago three teacher educators, one in special education, another in educational technology and the third in teacher education decided to work collaboratively on a joint project that would provide instructors and their pre-service teacher candidates, with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to effectively shape teachers’ beliefs, experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities. The impetus of this book Preparing Pre-service Teachers for the Inclusive Classroom, was to fill the gap in teachers’ knowledge and positively shape teacher’s experiences with working with students with disabilities. As teacher educators we know that our role provides the foundation for the beliefs, attitudes and skills that future teachers bring into the classroom. Moreover, the classroom has changed so much in the past decade that instructors of pre-service teachers may also lack the experiences and knowledge to work with students with exceptionalities. Each chapter in this book was written by experts in the field and selected to support teacher educators, in-service teachers, administrators and pre-service teachers in nurturing, teaching and designing instruction for every child that enters their classroom.

In Chapter 1, “What Do We Know and Where Can We Grow? Teacher Preparation for the Inclusive Classroom,” Dr. Patricia Dickenson challenges teacher preparation programs to go beyond the stand-alone course of teaching students with exceptionalities, and infuse all course content in teacher preparation programs with content knowledge, pedagogical practices and first-hand experiences to support students
with exceptionalities. She contends that teacher education programs must determine pre-service teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards working with students with disabilities and then design instruction that will positively shape attitudes towards students with disabilities.

In Chapter 2, “Discovering Basics: Assistive Technology (AT) Implementation and Best Practices,” Dr. Jennifer Courduff addresses the complexity of preparing new teachers for the inclusive classroom. One critical component of this preparation is the fostering of a deep understanding of effective implementation of assistive technology (AT). Those who embrace this effort are faced with a set of challenges that are not found in traditional technology integration systems or professional development offerings. In this chapter, Dr. Courduff expands upon and updates the work of a previous publication (Courduff, Duncan, & Gilbreath, 2013), by reviewing assistive technology basics and identifying unaddressed perspectives that impede technology implementation within the inclusive classroom.

In Chapter 3, “Teaching the Individual: Angelica’s Inquiry,” Dr. Patricia Jean Crain de Galarce and Roxanne White address the need for a balanced approach in preparing new teachers to meet the needs of all learners. This chapter explains the process of finding balance through an innovative teacher preparation education model; called Urban Teachers; which is specifically designed to develop new teachers with the resources needed to succeed in inclusive classroom environments. As Angelica’s dialogue illustrates, the inclusion of all students means more than meeting the least restricted environment legislation. The background of special education clinical coursework gives novice teachers the perspective of reaching the individual. When teachers are prepared to understand each student and work from their strengths, classrooms become inviting, safe, and dynamic. It is a paradigm shift of teaching to the students’ strengths and not just covering the curriculum and standards. This chapter provides the unique perspective of a new teacher as she grapples with fully understanding how to meet the needs of all learners in an inclusive classroom.

In the second section of this book we share best practices for designing instruction. Teachers tend to teach the way they were taught and teacher-directed instruction may be perceived as a one-size fits all approach that fails to incorporate the diverse needs, preferences, and experiences that students with exceptionalities need for a meaningful learning experience. Furthermore, we know that all students learn differently and that we can empower our students by designing instruction that is specifically tailored to support their learning needs, strengths and abilities.

In Chapter 4, “Instructional Scaffolding to Promote an Autonomous Learner,” Dr. Jess Gregory presents strategies for teachers to develop more autonomous learners in their classroom. The chapter also presents Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a framework for developing curriculum for diverse learners. Creating autonomous learners encompasses setting high expectations, using the Backwards Design model to plan, providing multiple means for students to succeed and scaffolding activities. The goal of this chapter is to show various methods and activities to “create a community of autonomous learners and to build skills that encourage self-reliance rather than dependence on teachers or other adults” (Gregory, in press).

In Chapter 5, “Supporting Secondary Students with Disabilities in an Inclusive Environment,” Dr. Pam Epler discusses essential knowledge that the secondary pre-service teachers have regarding different categories of disabilities listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). Since students with disabilities are present in all classrooms, it is critical that teachers understand how to develop their instruction and assignments to properly educate students who fall into one or more of the categories. This chapter will assist the pre-service teacher in being prepared to provide the very
best educational experience for these students. The main sections of this chapter focus on the 13 IDEA disability categories. Each section includes the definition and characteristics of a specific category as well as how it impacts learning. The prevalence of the exceptionality occurring in the secondary classroom is also discussed so that pre-service teachers will know which disability categories they are most likely to encounter while teaching. Finally, each section includes a discussion and examples of various research-based instructional strategies and assignments, as well as resources such as websites or illustrations that can be utilized.

In Chapter 6, “Best Practices Implementing Special Education Curriculum and Common Core State Standards Using UDL,” Drs. Penelope Keough, and Dina Pacis provide a strategic pathway to differentiate instruction that can meet all students learning preference and individualized education goals. The authors hit the heart of instructional design by providing the reader with a framework to design instruction for students with multiple entry points to acquire information, and demonstrate their understanding.

In the third section of this book, we focus on core academic subject areas that students need to develop proficiency and conceptual understanding in order to be college and career ready regardless of their disability. We believe that pre-service teachers are not sufficiently prepared to support students who may struggle with basic skills as the focus may be on academic content and not academic skills. For example, across content areas students need to know how to write well, therefore pre-service teachers need to know evidence based strategies to support the teaching of writing. Unfortunately, people with learning disabilities (LD) and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) do not perform these executive functions well, such as organizing, planning, goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-assessing; therefore, they do not write at a proficient level. In addition, students from low socio-economic status (SES) also do not perform these executive functions well; therefore they do not write at a proficient level.

In Chapter 7, “Teaching Writing to Low Socio-Economic Students with Learning Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder,” Dr. David Rago reviews the ecobiodevelopmental (EBD) framework in providing structure for the chapter. Within this framework, the writing traits of students with LD and ASD are described, as is the impact poverty has on students’ cognitive learning systems. Different ways to teach writing are presented at the end of the chapter. These different writing strategies are shown to support the cognitive learning systems and executive functioning of low SES students who have LD and/or ASD.

In Chapter 8, “Mathematics Strategies,” Dr. Loreilie Chapman addresses the role of mathematics instruction to support all learners in the classroom. Mathematics performance has taken center stage with an emphasis on developing conceptual understanding, mathematical fluency and procedural knowledge. Dr. Chapman explains the emphasis for teachers to have content knowledge as well as pedagogical practices that will support student understanding and develop procedural fluency. As students struggle in learning mathematics, pre-service teachers will need effective practices to make content meaningful and develop efficient routines that allow all students to develop and progress in their understanding while building their conceptual knowledge. Dr. Loreilie Chapman addresses these areas with practical examples built on empirical research in learning mathematics. Dr. Chapman explains how the approaches and evidence-based strategies can be used to maximize student learning of mathematics in the inclusive classroom.

In Chapter 9, “Specific Learning Disabilities: Reading, Spelling, and Writing Strategies,” by Dr. George Udigwone, the role of service providers is examined. This role is critical enough to warrant the multi-pronged approaches adopted by education systems to build and sustain capacity. This chapter focuses on best practices that can usher students with learning disabilities (LD) into a productive future.
The chapter examines LD definition, identification and prevalence of LD, common types of LD and supports, and associated disorders and supports. The concluding section reiterates the importance of early identification and intervention within the context of collaboration.

In Chapter 10, “Addressing the Needs in Reading of the Dyslexic Learner in the Inclusive Classroom,” Dr. Enid-Acosta-Tello shares teaching ideas, methodologies, and strategies which will help the preservice teacher address some of the needs of the dyslexic learner within the inclusive classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was designed to help meet the needs of students with disabilities. However, children diagnosed with dyslexia were excluded from special education services because they did not qualify. Children with dyslexia continue to fall outside the qualification guidelines for special educational service. For this reason, many classroom teachers find themselves with children in their classes who are unable, or struggle to, read. As students with dyslexia are not required to receive special services under IDEA, reading support is often overlooked for them. This can be perplexing to the preservice teacher because the students do not receive the crucial extra help they need in order to be successful in school.

The African Proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” rings true in the final section of this book. This section focuses on identification and continuous collaborative support between school leaders and partners to best support students with exceptionalities. Moreover the role of effective communication and partnerships is essential in developing continuous support and strategies that are truly designed for the individual.

In Chapter 11, “The Masking Effect: Hidden Gifts and Disabilities of 2e Students,” Dr. Jessica Canaday discusses intelligence theory in relation to the twice exceptional child. This chapter focuses on understanding the twice-exceptional child as multifaceted intellectually, recognizing the need for diverse methods of identification, including universal screening, in order to ensure that twice exceptional students receive necessary services, exploring multiple differentiation and support strategies for twice-exceptional students utilizing a Response to Intervention model, and understanding the emotional difficulties twice exceptional status has on students when support is lacking.

Methods for identifying twice-exceptional children utilizing a combination of gifted and talented education practices and special education practices are explored, with a particular focus on the Response to Intervention universal screening process. Diverse methods and strategies for meeting the individual needs of twice-exceptional students are explored, along with the masking affect that complicates identification of twice-exceptional students. Additional notes on the emotional difficulties twice exceptional children may face are included.

In Chapter 12, “Educating the Whole Child,” Drs. Denise Hexom and Shaila Mulholland define social, emotional learning (SEL); provide a brief historical perspective of social emotional learning in the United States; examine the research on SEL in terms of impact on students; understand the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework for determining successful and evidence-based program and provide insight for preservice teachers on social emotional learning (SEL) and suggested strategies new teachers can include in their classrooms. The authors conclude the chapter by discussing five key factors in the development and implementation of SEL initiatives in the setting.

In Chapter 13, “Implementing Effective Student Study Teams,” Drs. Tricia Crosby-Cooper and Dina Pacis explore the misconception that a Student Study Team (SST) meeting is the inroad to qualifying a student for special education. The chapter goes on to clarify the three Tiers of Response to Intervention (RTI) to support students who struggle with mastering academics and/or appropriate behavior. The
authors refer to Tier 3 as the most intensive application of interventions to support struggling students. They claim Tier 3 of RTI is the most appropriate venue to refer students who do not show gains with the most intensive interventions for assessment for possible qualification for special education. “The purpose of an SST is to assist school staff in the problem solving process of developing and implementing interventions” (Crosby-Cooper & Pacis, in press). The organization of an SST is further outlined in this chapter, as well as its emphasis on the problem solving approach including descriptions of each component of the approach. SSTs have reduced referrals to special education as research evidence shows according to the authors. SSTs are not without challenge, but recommendations such as more training for integral staff involved in the organization and conduct of SST meetings are suggested. Additionally, scholars would benefit the educational community by offering further research in the effectiveness and management of SSTs.

In Chapter 14, “Parents as Partners in the Special Education Process: A Parent’s Perspective with Suggestions for Educators,” Dr. Cynthia Chandler shares her personal experience of how children may become eligible for special education services. She highlights the role of developmental milestones and personal events in a family that can influence learning disabilities. Dr. Chandler includes best practices for teachers to create successful partnerships with parents of students with exceptionalities.

We begin this book with a comprehensive overview of the current status of teacher education. This book concludes with a focus on school partnerships and collaboration to support all constituents who work with students with exceptionalities. We believe with students at the forefront, innovative practices and approaches to instruction can be seamlessly integrated into daily instruction. With minimal research addressing how teacher education programs can promote positive attitudes and interactions between pre-service teachers and students with exceptionalities, we believe this publication is timely. Our aim is to provide instructors of pre-service teachers and teacher candidates with the knowledge skills and dispositions to be well prepared for the inclusive classroom.

We thank you for your interest in our publication and look forward to engaging in a constructive dialogue with you on our website: http://tinyurl.com/teachforinclusive.

Sincerely, the Editors,

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REFERENCES


