Chapter 1
What do we Know and Where Can We Grow? Teachers Preparation for the Inclusive Classroom

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ABSTRACT

General educators have been charged with the responsibility of teaching students with exceptionalities, yet many report they do not have the skills to effectively instruct diverse learners, including those with disabilities (Blanton, et al., 2011). Currently, more than half of all students with disabilities spend about 80% of their day in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This shift to educate all in the general education classroom increases the demand on teachers to be accountable for all learners academic achievement. The goal of this chapter is to provide instructors of teacher education programs with a review of current research in the field and recommendations for teacher preparation programs to effectively support and positively shape pre-service teachers attitudes and beliefs about students with exceptionalities.

INTRODUCTION

The 1996 release of What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) set the stage for more than two decades of teacher education reform. This influential report revealed teacher preparation is in need of improvement and set forth an aggressive agenda which included higher standards for teacher education and accreditation. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) brought forth teacher education standards which included higher admission standards, rationales for content of education coursework and a stronger emphasis on subject matter preparation for school accreditation. In 2010 the NCATE report titled Transforming Teacher Education Through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers called for teacher education to be rooted in clinical practice and interconnected to

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course work and content. Most recently, the Council for the Accreditation of the Educator Preparation (CAEP) replaced NCATE and is the national accreditation agency for teacher education. The recently approved accreditation standards (CAEP, 2013a) places an emphasis on clinical practice which includes the candidates’ ability to demonstrate their effectiveness to positively impact all students’ learning and development. Moreover candidates must possess the skills and commitment to promote access for all P-12 students for college and career ready standards. CAEP defines P-12 learners as

*Children or youth attending P-12 schools including, but not limited to, students with disabilities or exceptionalities, students who are gifted, and students who represent diversity based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, language, religion, sexual identification and/or geographic origin.* (CAEP, 2013b)

**Teacher Preparation Reform**

In 1998, The United States Department of Education, Title II Higher Education Act focused on improving teacher preparation through accountability measures for institutions of higher education. Teacher preparation programs must prepare an annual report on the preparation program quality. The report must contain information such as:

- Pass rates of students who completed a teacher education program on state’s licensure examinations.
- Number of students enrolled.
- Number of hours required to complete in practice teaching.
- Faculty to student ratio.
- Whether the teacher education program is approved or accredited by the state.
- If the institution has been identified as low-performing by the state.

Legislation raises the bar for teacher preparation with an emphasis on accountability and performance measures. This information is useful for states to determine which programs need support or assistance. Teacher education programs are also driven to be competitive as well as compared nationwide as a measure for growth and improvement. Teachers who are fully prepared and certified are much more effective than uncertified or provisionally certified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Moreover, prospective teacher candidates can make informed decisions about teacher preparation programs based on performance outcomes and accreditation status. Darling Hammond also reported teacher preparation and certification to be the strongest correlation among student achievement in reading and mathematics when controlling for student poverty and language status (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

As a direct result of state and national legislation teacher education and preparation programs have evolved to address the changing student demographics. This has resulted in continual reform in policy and legislation related to student inclusion and the practice of mainstreaming special education students into the traditional classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) requires students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This legislation marked an important shift in public school classrooms, from special education and general education students in two separate settings, to the inclusion of all students in a general education class. As a result of this legislation general education teachers are required to support all learners and create an environment that takes into consideration their individual needs, learning preferences, and expectations.