Chapter 5
Preparing Critical, Secondary Special Educators: An Inclusive, Disability Studies Approach

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ABSTRACT
In this chapter the author explores teacher preparation as the logical site for cultivating praxis for secondary inclusive education. The author describes a university course on inclusive education for preparing critical special education teachers. The author offers disability studies in education (DSE) as a theoretical framework for supporting critical thought and creating just and inclusive educational practices for students with disabilities in P-21 settings. The author then outlines two themes that ground the architectural design of the course: re/thinking students (person-first narratives of disability) and re/designing pedagogy (Universal Design for Learning). According to Smith (2009), DSE “sees oppression and prejudice in sociocultural contexts and seeks to address those concerns” (p. 215). In preparing critical special educators it is our job to help students not only “see” the oppression of exclusion, but to provide them with concrete ways to create change and remain resilient.

INTRODUCTION
In this chapter I explore teacher preparation as the logical site for cultivating praxis for secondary inclusive education. I describe a university course that I have taught for three years (used in various aspects of other courses for six years prior) on inclusive education while preparing critical special education teachers. I offer disability studies in education (DSE) as a theoretical framework for supporting critical thought and creating just and inclusive educational practices for students with disabilities in P-21 settings. I then outline two themes that ground the architectural design of my course: re/thinking our students (person-first narratives of disability) and re/designing our pedagogy (Universal Design for Learning). According to Smith (2009), DSE “sees oppression and prejudice in sociocultural contexts and seeks to address those concerns” (p. 215). In preparing critical special educators it is my job to help my students

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Preparing Critical, Secondary Special Educators

not only “see” the oppression of exclusion, but to provide them with concrete ways to create change and remain resilient. The two overarching objectives of this chapter include: 1) to provide DSE as theoretical framework for cultivating inclusive teaching philosophies, and 2) to offer the practices of person-first narratives of disability and Universal Design for Learning as sites of pedagogical classroom change.

BACKGROUND

Why a Concern for Inclusion in Secondary Schools and Classrooms?

As a teacher educator and researcher whose scholarship is grounded in public engagement, much of my time is spent in public schools and classrooms. Coaching in-service teachers, observing pre-service teachers, facilitating Professional Learning Communities, leading professional development, and talking to students with and without disabilities. Decades after PL 94-142 was signed into law, opening the doors of public education to students with disabilities, and decades after the “mainstreaming clause” of this law was written, inclusion remains illusive to many students, families, teachers, and schools.

While students with disabilities are spending more and more time in general education environments every year (most recent reports from OSEP (2016) indicate 62% of students with disabilities spend at least 80% of their school day in the general education classroom), numbers vary greatly by disability label (i.e., only 17% of students with intellectual disabilities spend a majority of their day in the general education classroom), geographic region, and race (i.e., 57% of students Black or African American students with disabilities spend a majority of their day in the general education classroom). And when compared to elementary classrooms, students in secondary settings tend to receive their education in less inclusive settings (Ashby & Cosier, 2012).

Decades of research on high quality inclusive education explicitly and unambiguously demonstrates its superior outcomes for students with disabilities as well as their nondisabled peers. Achievement and learning opportunities are enhanced for all students because teachers work to create strength-based classrooms, increase student access to resources and technology, implement differentiated instruction, and teach skills for collaboration and interdependence (Baker, Wang and Wahlberg 1994; Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, Demph-Aldrich, 2011; Fisher, Pumian, & Sax, 2000; Kasa-Hendrickson & Ashby, 2009; McDonnell, Thorson, Disher, Mathot-Buckner, 2001; Waldron and McLeskey, 1998). For students with disabilities, both IEP goals and academic learning are achieved at greater rates (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008). And more recently, Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, and Theoharis (2013) found that the greatest predictor of math and reading achievement for students with disabilities was the amount of time spent in the general education classroom.

But as Ashby and Cosier (2012) note, “the dismal graduation and employment rates of students with disabilities indicate that something must be done to provide secondary students with more opportunities to learn in inclusive settings” (p. 13). Research also demonstrates better adult outcomes related to community living and employment, social interaction, and natural support systems for students educated in inclusive settings (Ryndak, Jackson, & Billingsley, 2010). And according to Certo, et al. (2003), if we begin inclusion early, segregation after school ends is less likely to happen. Unfortunately, teachers and school districts often do not view themselves as having the skills or resources to effectively educate students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.