

Embedding High-Leverage Practices into Special Education Field Experiences

AUTHORS

Elizabeth Grobart
Lauren Zepp

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ABSTRACT

Through special education teacher education, the preparation, support, and ultimately retention of highly qualified special educators is made possible with systematically designed field experiences. Tailored field experiences and supervision ensure candidates are equipped to meet the increasing demands of the field and have the requisite tools for longevity in the field. Specific alignment with High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) provides preservice teachers with multiple opportunities to apply knowledge and skills from coursework. Additionally, this work can continue through induction to increase the likelihood of long-term success in the field. Offered in this article is a model for policy and practice in personnel preparation toward the goal of addressing the critical shortage of highly qualified special educators nationwide. Specifically, teacher preparation programs can strategically embed HLPs into all components of programming to bridge coursework and field experiences through systematic application of course assignments to fieldwork, as well as repeated opportunities to reflect on the implementation of HLPs during field experiences both independently and collaboratively.

KEYWORDS

Field experiences, High-Leverage practices, special education, teacher preparation

Across the United States, schools struggle to provide adequate services to students with disabilities due to a continued severe shortage of qualified special education teachers (Boe, 2014; U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2016). During the 2022-2023 academic year, over 40 states reported shortages of special educators (U.S. DOE, n.d.). Over half of public schools reported feeling understaffed, and 65% of these schools were understaffed in special education, surpassing general education (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). Furthermore, nearly 80% of public schools reported difficulty hiring fully certified special educators (NCES, 2022). Enrollment in teacher preparation programs declined by 35% between 2009 and 2015 (DeMonte et al., 2016) and analyses have consistently illustrated decreased numbers of special education program completers (DeMonte et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2022). At the same time, declines in the special educator workforce exceeded changes in the identification of students with disabilities (Harper et al., 2022). Special education has been designated as a high-need area for teachers and the demand for teachers in this area exceeds the supply, despite being a popular degree field (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education [AACTE], 2022).

Across undergraduate degree and certificate specialty areas, nine percent of degrees and certificates in the 2018-19 academic year were conferred in special education (AACTE, 2022). Therefore, the demands placed on special educators, and subsequently teacher preparation programs, have grown (Leko et al., 2015), requiring a clear need for innovation in teacher preparation to address this issue and produce quality special educators.

High-Leverage practices have emerged in several teaching domains toward the goal of clarifying effective instructional practices (Nelson et al., 2022; O'Flaherty & Beal, 2018). Within special education, High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) for students with disabilities in the areas of collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction were developed with support from the Council for Exceptional

Children (McLeskey & Brownell, 2015; see also Table 1 for a list of HLPs). While many teacher preparation programs have used these HLPs to restructure coursework (Maheady et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2022; Windschitl et al., 2019), gaps between coursework and field experiences persist. Structured field experiences can help to bridge this gap by enhancing preservice special educators' capacity to use HLPs through practice-based opportunities (e.g., Maheady et al., 2019). Engaging in such opportunities affords pre-service teachers (PSTs) the chance to build their capacity for instructional decision-making and expertise (Benedict et al., 2016).

Recognizing the importance of multiple opportunities to apply pedagogical content knowledge in authentic contexts (Billingsley et al., 2019; Leko et al., 2015), our model emphasizes structured field experiences for PSTs in special education. According to the AACTE (2018) Clinical Practice Commission, high-quality teacher preparation requires clinical practice to support PSTs' process of learning through ongoing practice. Field experiences positively contribute to the development of special educators as they offer PSTs the opportunity to apply their knowledge in authentic settings (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). A recent literature review of special education teacher preparation field experiences found common field experience learning activities were related to lesson planning, data collection, reflection, video recording, and feedback through coaching and observations (O'Brien et al., 2023). Given their impact on teacher effectiveness and retention, practice-based approaches to special education teacher preparation are frequently recommended (e.g., Benedict et al., 2016). Case studies, rehearsal, video analysis, virtual reality simulations, microteaching, coaching, lesson study, and aligned field experiences are research-supported

practice-based learning opportunities (Benedict et al., 2016; Brownell et al., 2019). Such opportunities can be provided through both coursework and fieldwork. Determining the length of the field experience, selecting instructional activities, identifying PSTs' work products, assessing PSTs, and providing continued feedback are recommended steps in designing and studying field experiences (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). Drawing on practice-based approaches found to promote the use of HLPs during field experience (e.g., Brownell et al., 2019) and research on effective special education field experiences (e.g., Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017), we developed a model that allows PSTs to work with a mentor teacher and a university supervisor to practice integrating HLPs in authentic contexts, receive coaching and feedback, and develop as professional educators.

HLPs and Structured Field Experiences

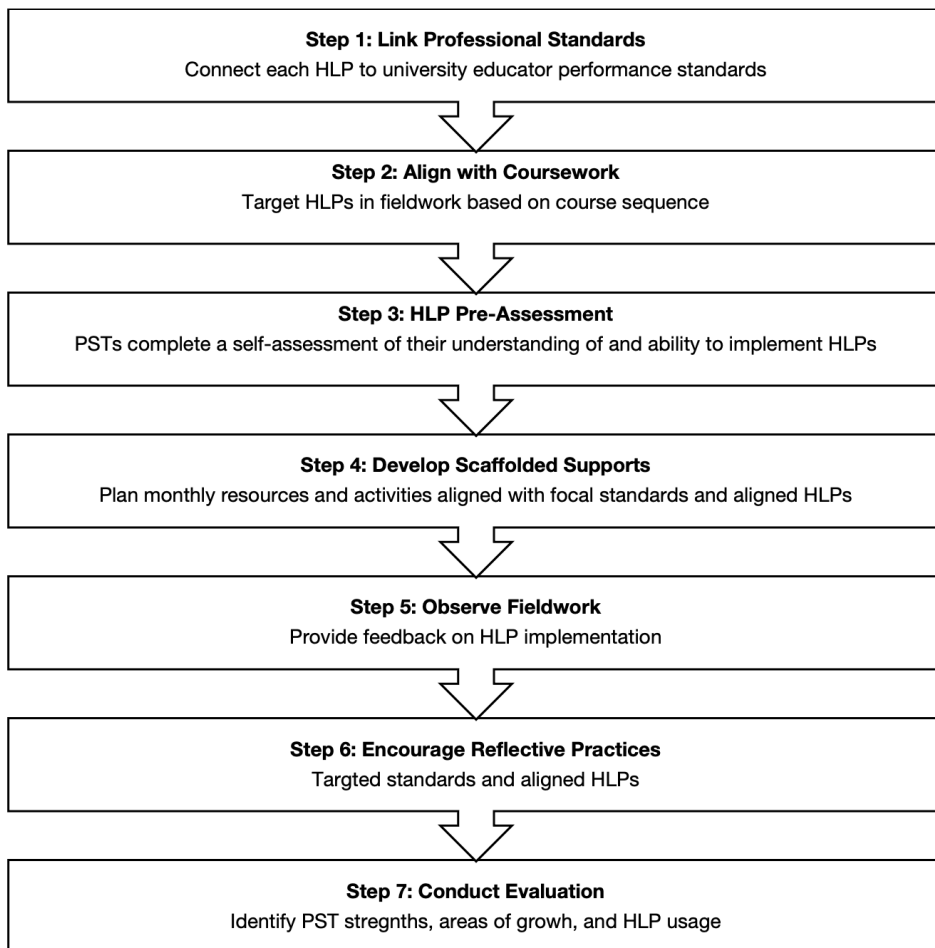
Since the creation of the HLPs for special education by McLeskey and Brownell (2015), a growing body of research has highlighted the importance of HLPs for special educators (e.g., Billingsley et al., 2019; McLeskey et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2022). Given this, teacher educators utilize HLPs to plan teacher preparation programs with much of the emphasis placed on the role of HLPs within coursework (Windschitl et al., 2019; Maheady et al., 2019). To bridge the gap between coursework and field experiences, it is also necessary to embed HLPs within structured field experiences so that PSTs have opportunities to both learn about and use effective practices (Brownell et al., 2019). Research shows that a shared definition of practices is insufficient for implementation. Rather, employing HLPs in teacher preparation must include a scaffolded approach with opportunities for application, feedback,

and reflection (Windschitl et al., 2019). Integrating a specific set of practices, such as HLPs, into field experiences in a cyclical and advancing manner can offer great value to special education PSTs (Mathews et al., 2023).

HLPs can be embedded into teacher preparation programs in a variety of ways, dependent on contextual factors and through the use of holistic, signature set, and individualized approaches (Markelz et al., 2021). The most comprehensive approach is the holistic approach, in which all HLPs are integrated into coursework and fieldwork. This approach can increase program coherence and involves participation from most faculty in a teacher preparation program (Markelz et al., 2021). Focusing on a signature set of HLPs necessitates selecting core practices to embed into the preparation program, requiring prioritization and promoting deeper learning of the selected HLPs. In this approach, several HLPs are intentionally selected and embedded to promote enrichment. An individualized approach involves a smaller subset of faculty selecting a reduced number of HLPs to include in their course(s) when there is limited interest and opportunity for wider implementation (Markelz et al., 2021). In our current model, we drew on multiple approaches to embedding HLPs into a special education teacher preparation program. University supervisors engaged in a multi-step process to align field experiences with HLPs, program-specific standards, and course sequences.

Our work was situated within an accelerated residency model at a state university special education teacher preparation program with field placement supervisors who were interested in strategically integrating HLPs into fieldwork with continuous reflective practices. This residency model, funded by a federal grant, consisted of two

FIGURE 1: Multi-Step Process to Embed HLPs with Program Standards



summer semesters of hybrid coursework and two regular semesters of in-person coursework combined with a 10-month residency in a partner school. While completing coursework, PSTs were paired with a cooperating or mentor teacher in partner schools, allowing for a supportive student teaching experience with scaffolded support faded over the course of the academic year, and attended classes in the evenings. Fieldwork observations were conducted virtually four times per semester. PSTs were not employed as full-time teachers or by school districts, but rather received a stipend as part of the grant. Upon completion of the program and the final portfolio (see Step 7), the PSTs earned a master's degree in special education and a K-12 cross categorical special

education license. A combination of a holistic and individualized approach was taken to embed all 22 HLPs into this model, targeting purposefully sequenced sets of HLPs within fieldwork. Figure 1 illustrates the process we employed to develop our model, with each component of the seven-step model detailed in the following sections.

The Process for Embedding HLPs into Special Education Field Experiences

Step 1: Link Professional Standards

As the first step in the process, we reviewed the linkage between the HLPs for special education and the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC, 2020) Initial Special Education Preparation Standards to identify connections

with the program-specific preparation standards. These standards describe the program's learning outcomes and are similar to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2013). Using this linkage as a model, we then mapped the HLPs to the program-specific teacher preparation standards. Each HLP was mapped onto only one program standard to streamline the focus areas, although multiple areas of alignment were possible. Table 1 shows the linkage between the university performance standard domains and the HLPs.

Step 2: Align with Coursework and Developmental Progression

Next, we divided the linkage between the university preparation standards and the HLPs to be addressed strategically over 10 months. During this step, we considered PSTs' developmental progression, timing within the academic year, and course sequencing to determine which domains and aligned HLPs were most logical for each month. For example, we selected the Learner and Learning Environment domain and aligned HLPs for September, as PSTs were beginning their field experiences and had not yet completed coursework on instruction or assessment. Assessment was selected for December, as this coincided with the completion of a course on this topic. This intentional alignment provided authentic experiences implementing HLPs toward the ideal of high impact and low effort (Markelz et al., 2021).

Some HLPs are difficult to observe through fieldwork observations. Specifically, HLPs in the Collaboration practice area may not be directly observable or present during classroom instruction, which is traditionally the focus of fieldwork observations. In contrast, PSTs have more opportunities to practice implementing HLPs from the

TABLE 1: Linkage Between University Performance Standard Domains and HLPs

University Performance Standard Domains	High-Leverage Practices (HLPs)
Learner and Learning Environment	1. Collaborate with professionals to increase student success. 7. Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment. 14. Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.
Planning and Preparation	6. Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes. 11. Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals. 12. Systematically design instruction toward specific learning goals. 13. Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals. 19. Use assistive and instructional technologies.
Engagement and Instruction	8. Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior. 9. Teach social behaviors. 15. Provide scaffolded supports. 16. Use explicit instruction. 17. Use flexible grouping. 18. Use strategies to promote active student engagement. 20. Provide intensive instruction. 21. Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings. 22. Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.
Assessment	4. Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs. 5. Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs. 10. Conduct functional behavioral assessments to develop individual student behavior support plans.
Professionalism and Ethics	2. Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families. 3. Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.

Instruction and Social/Emotional/Behavioral practice areas. To address this, we intentionally distributed HLPs across the performance standard domains and considered where HLPs were also being addressed through coursework. We also encouraged PSTs to observe their mentor teacher collaborating with professionals and families, as well as conducting meetings, and to utilize the reflection prompts shown in Step 6 to reflect on these observations. PSTs were further encouraged to make connections to less visible HLP implementation during their

observation debriefings. For instance, collaboration among professionals may not be directly observed during a co-taught lesson; however, the PSTs could share about and reflect on the co-planning process in their written reflection and in the subsequent triad meeting with their field supervisor and mentor teacher. Additionally, as is detailed in Step 7, PSTs were required to submit artifacts aligned with each performance standard domain and HLP practice area. Therefore, field supervisors regularly and explicitly discussed the critical role

less visible HLPs play in high-quality instruction and student engagement.

Step 3: HLP Pre-Assessment

Conducting baseline assessments enables teacher educators to see which HLPs are currently being taught in coursework (Markelz et al., 2021). Although we did not explicitly assess HLP instruction in coursework, field supervisors were aware of HLP instruction occurring in the reading, math, and assessment methods courses due to their instructional role in those courses. To

TABLE 2: Selected Scaffolded Supports by Month

Month and Focus Areas	Scaffolded Supports
<p>November</p> <p>Domain: Engagement and Instruction</p> <p>HLPs: 8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22</p>	<p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-Leverage Practices in Special Education (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 69-116) • Big Ideas in Special Education (Riccomini et al., 2017) • Whole-Group Response Strategies to Promote Student Engagement in Inclusive Classrooms (Nagro et al., 2016) <p>Self-Paced Modules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRIS Center Module: Scaffolded Supports (2005) • IRIS Center Module: Assistive Technology (2020) <p>Videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HLP 16: Use explicit instruction (Kennedy et al., 2018) • HLP 17: Use flexible grouping (Kennedy et al., 2019a) • HLP 20: Provide intensive instruction (Kennedy et al., 2019b)
<p>December</p> <p>Domain: Assessment</p> <p>HLPs: 4, 5</p>	<p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-Leverage Practices in Special Education (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 41-54) • The Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity (Fuchs et al., 2017) <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRIS Center Case Study: Data-based decision making (Brown et al., 2009a) • IRIS Center Case Study: Progress Monitoring (Brown et al., 2009b)
<p>March</p> <p>Domain: Professionalism and Ethics</p> <p>HLPs: 2, 3</p>	<p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-Leverage Practices in Special Education (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 27-40) • Developing collaborative partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families during the IEP process (Rossetti et al., 2017) • Strategies for helping parents of young children address challenging behaviors in the home (Chai & Lieberman-Betz, 2018) <p>Self-Paced Modules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRIS Center Module: Student Centered Transition Planning (2017)

gather baseline assessment data, PSTs completed an electronic self-assessment adapted from the HLP self-assessment developed by the CEEDAR Center (VanUitert & Holdheide, 2021). Using a Likert scale, PSTs rated their understanding of target HLPs from (1) “I am unfamiliar with this principle or element” to (5) “Mastered. I already apply this skill to my work and have noted improvements in student learning.” They responded to statements such as “I create

lessons where student outcomes are clear, measurable, ambitious, attainable, and actionable,” “I provide scaffolded supports (e.g., graphic organizers, sentence stems) across a wide range of areas (e.g., academics, behavior, social skills),” and “I provide positive and specific feedback on student learning.” This tool allowed us to gather data on PSTs’ perceptions of and familiarity with HLPs and to monitor their progress over time as the assessment was administered

twice per semester.

Step 4: Develop Scaffolded Supports

Based on the pre-assessment data, we developed a bank of resources to scaffold PSTs’ implementation of HLPs and to complement learning from coursework. To meet the requirements of the residency model, PSTs were expected to attend their field placement daily for the duration of the school day. To accom-

TABLE 3: Observation Schedule and Tasks

Month and Focus Areas	PST Tasks	Field Supervisor Tasks
September Domain: Learner and Learning Environment HLPs: 1, 7, 14, 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HLP self-assessment • Observation cycle 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial triad meeting • Written feedback • Debrief observation 1
October Domain: Planning and Preparation HLPs: 6, 11, 12, 13, 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation cycle 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback • Debrief observation 2
November Domain: Engagement and Instruction HLPs: 8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-term self-evaluation • HLP self-assessment • Observation cycle 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-term evaluation • Written feedback • Debrief observation 3
December Domain: Assessment HLPs: 4, 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation cycle 4 • Semester 1 self-evaluation • HLP self-assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback • Debrief observation 4 • Semester 1 evaluation
February Domain: Behavioral and Classroom Management HLPs: 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation cycle 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback • Debrief observation 5
March Domain: Professionalism and Ethics HLPs: 2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation cycle 6 • Mid-term self-evaluation • HLP self-assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback • Debrief observation 6 • Mid-term evaluation • Collaborate with PST to identify focal areas for remaining observations
April PST-Selected Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation cycle 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback • Debrief observation 7
May PST-Selected Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation cycle 8 • Semester 2 self-evaluation • HLP self-assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback • Debrief observation 8 • Semester 2 evaluation

modate some in-person courses, occasional early releases were permitted, as were structured workdays on campus to provide additional time for coursework and final portfolio completion. Monthly resources and activities focused on the targeted university performance standard domains and aligned HLPs. We organized these materials in a shared online drive. However, creating self-paced modules in a learning management system would be an ideal way to organize

resources for easy access. PSTs were also provided with video examples of HLPs. Alternatively, modeling of target HLPs by field supervisors would further practice-based learning opportunities by exhibiting expert performance (Benedict et al., 2016) for PSTs to then enact in their own practice. Engagement with these scaffolded supports was strongly encouraged but not required nor graded. Coordination with a seminar or other assigned credit hours would further

strengthen this approach by adding accountability for engaging with the HLP resources. Table 2 displays a selection of scaffolded supports as an example.

Step 5: Observe Fieldwork

PSTs were required to complete four observation cycles per semester with additional associated tasks as detailed in Table 3. Each observation cycle entailed reviewing the criteria for success in the target domain, planning the lesson,

TABLE 4: Reflection Prompts Aligned with Standards and HLPs

DOMAIN AND HLPs	REFLECTION PROMPTS
Domain: Learner and Learning Environment HLPs: 1, 7, 14, 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did your students feel throughout the lesson? How do you know? Is that what you hoped for? How did your students' feelings and reactions impact your decision making? • What personal teaching and relationship building strengths and characteristics do you have? How can you use these to support student learning and well-being? • How does your current teacher identity contrast with the teacher you hope to become? How will you know you are closing the gap? What activities will you engage in to close the gap when you are a full-time practitioner? What can I do to best support you?
Domain: Planning and Preparation HLPs: 6, 11, 12, 13, 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you want your students to learn? • What did your students already know about the learning objectives, and how do you know? How did your understanding about your students' prior knowledge shape your decision making? • What makes this lesson a significant moment in your practice?
Domain: Engagement and Instruction HLPs: 8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What materials and strategies did you use to engage pupils in the learning tasks? • How did you encourage student thinking? In what ways did your actions foster student learning? • Did the students meet the objective or learn anything new? Who got it and who didn't? How do you know?
Domain: Assessment HLPs: 4, 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did all your students demonstrate evidence of learning? How do you know? • Which students did not meet the expected learning outcomes based on the assessment data? What will you do now for those students? • How will you share student learning data with the students? • How will you use the assessment information you collected during this lesson to inform future instruction?
Domain: Behavioral and Classroom Management HLPs: 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you demonstrate a consistent, positive learning environment during this lesson? • In what ways has your learning environment changed since the beginning of the school year? How do you feel these changes have impacted student behavior? • How do you collect data to monitor progress toward behavioral goals? How do you use the data you collect?
Domain: Professionalism and Ethics HLPs: 2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What relationships have been important to you and your teaching? What can you do to strengthen your membership in your school community? What support do you need to become better integrated into the school community? • How does your current teacher identity contrast with the teacher you hope to become? How will you know you are closing the gap? What activities will you engage in to close the gap when you are a full-time practitioner? What can I do to best support you?

revising the lesson plan, recording instruction, watching the recording paired with feedback from their field supervisor, and submitting a written reflection. Within each observation cycle, field supervisors provided targeted feedback on implementation of the selected HLPs using a virtual supervision platform (i.e., GoReact). Feedback was predominately provided on the focal HLPs for each month; however, feedback on the implementation of all HLPs was provided during the final two observations. Thus,

supervisors were able to implement both directive coaching, wherein the supervisor is the HLP expert sharing knowledge and skills through constructive feedback, and facilitative coaching, which involves supporting PSTs to construct new knowledge through reflective practices (Aguilar, 2013).

Utilizing a virtual supervision platform, directive coaching most often involved field supervisors providing time-stamped feedback on moments where PSTs demonstrated a HLP (e.g.,

simply noting “explicit instruction” or “asking this question allows you to assess student understanding”). A missed opportunity for implementation of a HLP with detailed commentary as to how to engage in the practice was also provided within directive coaching (e.g., “Before beginning with the new topic of the lesson, briefly review relevant previously learned skills/strategies”). This form of coaching and feedback, aimed at improving PSTs’ practice and expertise, is a cornerstone to providing quality

practice-based opportunities (Benedict et al., 2016). Facilitative coaching, on the other hand, most often took the form of questions posed by the field supervisors regarding specific moments of practice. For example, a supervisor might ask why a PST made a specific instructional decision (e.g., “What was your thought process with implementing feedback in this way?”) as well as inquire about alternative strategies they might implement in the future reflecting their practice (e.g., “How might you engage students with [topic] in a more meaningful way?”).

Using a virtual tool for field supervision also allowed the PSTs to watch their own instruction during the cycle of evaluation and identify individual areas for continued growth on specific HLPs. This required step was intended to promote PSTs’ use of feedback for developing their practice, as seen in teacher candidate self-efficacy (Mathews et al., 2023), and to support the development of their reflective abilities (deBettencourt & Nagro, 2019). PSTs also completed a survey reflecting the frequency of their usage of HLPs at multiple points during student teaching, allowing teacher candidates and university supervisors to identify specific practices to target for continued growth (Firestone et al., 2021). The intentional sequencing of HLPs during each observation cycle, with repeated foci areas and self-evaluation, offered opportunities for frequent and continued feedback and reflection. Additionally, as will be described in Step 6, PSTs participated in debriefing conversations via Zoom for additional coaching and feedback from their fieldwork supervisor.

Step 6: Encourage Reflective Practices

Central to the work of educators is the ability to reflect on one’s practice, and developing this skill begins during

teacher preparation. Therefore, with each observation of their instruction, PSTs were provided structured reflective opportunities. A series of intentionally sequenced reflection prompts, adapted from Soslau and Alexander (2021), related to target standards and aligned HLPs were offered to special education PSTs as illustrated in Table 4. Prior to engaging in a conversational debrief with their university supervisors, PSTs were encouraged to complete a written reflection for at least one of the given prompts. Written reflections were strongly suggested but not required, and as detailed below, were structured to support PSTs in developing their final portfolio. During the observation debrief, PSTs expanded upon their written reflections through a discussion with their field supervisors and mentors. If written reflections were not submitted, the observation debrief provided an opportunity to discuss the reflection prompts.

Additional broader reflective practices were also encouraged through supervisors asking questions such as, “Describe what went well during this lesson. How do you know?” and, “What are you proud of for yourself and your students from this lesson?” Encouragement of such analysis and reflective practices promotes PSTs’ self-awareness of their practice and areas for growth (Brownell et al., 2019), contributing to improvements in their instructional quality.

The written reflections and clear alignment with specific HLPs offered scaffolding to advance PSTs’ ability to successfully complete special education licensure requirements and enter the field.

Step 7: Conduct Evaluation

While PSTs were regularly encouraged to engage in individual reflective activities for each lesson, opportunities to reflect on their practice more holis-

tically through an evaluation occurred as a team twice each semester. This evaluation involved each team member (i.e., PST, university supervisor, and mentor teacher) individually completing an electronic survey prior to meeting together. Each team member identified the PST’s strengths, areas of growth, and usage of HLPs addressed to date, with PSTs also developing a specific goal for themselves. During the meeting, each member shared their individual reflections in a conversational manner, with discussions leading to strategizing how PSTs would continue to develop their practice and implementation of HLPs with the support of the team.

A final portfolio also served as an evaluation of PSTs’ mastery of the program-specific performance standards and implementation of HLPs. This portfolio included artifacts and narrative reflections selected by PSTs from their fieldwork experiences. In total, PSTs were required to identify 20 artifacts with two artifacts for each of the six domains of the performance standards and two artifacts for each of the four areas of the HLPs. For each artifact, PSTs completed a written narrative reflection to explain how the artifact illustrated their knowledge and skills for that particular domain or HLP practice area and to reflect on their progress over time. Because the scaffolded supports from Step 4 and reflection prompts utilized in Step 6 were crafted in alignment with the requirements of this final portfolio, PSTs could more easily identify artifacts to include in their portfolio and use the written reflections submitted after each observation as the foundation of their narrative. Once completed, portfolios were double scored with a rubric by two fieldwork supervisors. Differences in scoring were discussed until consensus was reached. Providing strategic support throughout fieldwork was intended to strengthen PSTs’ implementation of

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Elizabeth Grobart, PhD

Elizabeth Grobart, PhD is an assistant professor in the Institute of Professional Educator Development at the University of Wisconsin – Parkside, where she focuses on special education teacher education. Her research addresses the special educator workforce, including their roles and career decisions, and the preparation of special educators.

Lauren Zepp, PhD

Lauren Zepp, PhD is an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. Her research focuses on teacher education related to reading instruction and special education teacher preparation.

HLPs and to foster reflective growth, which was then evaluated in this final component of the teacher preparation program. Future research could use the results of final portfolios and the HLP self-assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach.

CONCLUSION

Special education teacher educators can tailor clinical experiences to align with coursework and HLPs as one approach to connecting knowledge acquisition and skill application (Brownell et al., 2019; McLeskey & Brownell, 2015). Using targeted resources and a scaffolded approach, this model provides tools for field supervision that integrates methods coursework and fosters reflective growth. Each month of field experience includes clear, observable goals related to HLPs and performance standards, resources to facilitate professional growth, and customized prompts for guided reflection. This approach promotes a structure and focus for PSTs to develop and refine their skills in using essential practices for the instruction of students with disabilities. Other teacher educators interested in following this process to strategically embed HLPs into fieldwork can readily do so with faculty committed to this process of redesign. An important aspect of embarking on this program development or redesign involves the intentional and realistic consideration of the context of the teacher preparation program, as this may influence how the aforementioned steps and support can be incorporated. Accountability for the completion of reflections and activities by PSTs is highly recommended. By embedding HLPs into structured field experiences, teacher educators can support PSTs in applying knowledge from coursework and deepening their ability to enact effective instructional practice. Ultimately, this results in improved outcomes for students

with disabilities through the development of a well-qualified special educator workforce possessing the knowledge and skills to remain in the field.

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