

# Teaching by Example: Reflecting on Anti-Oppressive Pedagogies in Special Education Teacher Preparation

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents a tool to inform course planning among special education teacher educators to center anti-oppressive practices in their syllabi and course design. The authors begin by describing the context of special education teacher preparation and the need for preparation programs to center intersectionality and foster the development of anti-oppressive practices. Next, the authors present a new critical preparation framework drawn from theory and pedagogy that center equity (e.g., resources in critical race theory, culturally sustaining pedagogy, DisCrit) and a review of relevant literature in teacher education. Based on these critical framings, the authors present a tool: A Guided Reflection of Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework to guide teacher educators through course revision or design that centers anti-oppressive practices. Finally, the authors present recommendations for teacher educators to apply the tool to their own courses to advance the use of anti-oppressive practices in teacher education and special education

## KEYWORDS

**anti-oppressive, equity, intersectionality, special education, teacher preparation**

School systems in the United States have a deep history of racism, exclusion, and discrimination on the basis of race (Annamma et al., 2013). Structural racism continues to limit the quality of educational opportunities available to students, with inequities being reified by schools (Cioè-Peña, 2022a; Noguera & Alica, 2021). In addition to race, systems of exclusion and oppression pertain to gender and sexuality, dis/ability, linguistic identity, and other identity constructs, further impacting the educational system in the U.S. For instance, these structural inequities have shaped decisions regarding student placement, curricula, and instruction provided to students who have been marginalized (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Cioè-Peña, 2022a; Gorski et al., 2013; Noguera & Alicea, 2021). Therefore, special education teacher preparation programs (SETPPs) and teacher educators (TEs) must engage in systemic change to support special education teacher candidates (SETCs) in developing social justice orientations and becoming explicitly anti-oppressive.

Pugach et al. (2021) defined the purpose of social justice in education as a “re-distribution of resources and educational opportunities for all students, through a transformative process that disrupts the marginalization of non-dominant social groups” (p. 238). Marginalization and oppression in schools are often enacted through ability-based or disciplinary exclusion, historical erasure within curricula, the persistence of meritocracy, or false conceptualizations of equality through color- and ability-evasiveness (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; McCray & Waitoller, 2023). In order to move towards intersectional social justice, aimed at achieving equity for students with multiple marginalized identities, TEs and teacher preparation programs (TPPs) must develop critical consciousness that rejects and attempts to repair the

harms of ableism and racism in education (Broderick & Lalvani, 2017; King, 1991). For our purposes, anti-oppressive pedagogy is defined as a set of beliefs, expectations, and critical awareness that lead educators to engage in instructional practices that promote equity and educational social justice for their students. The term anti-oppressive practices may include conceptual framings drawn from critical studies in race and dis/ability (Annamma et al., 2013) and a variety of asset-based and accessibility-driven pedagogical frameworks from teacher education (CAST, 2018; Cioè-Peña, 2022b; Paris, 2012). Just as pedagogy is the practice of blending teacher cognition with instructional decision-making (Fang, 1996), anti-oppressive pedagogy is the practice of enacting resistance through the adoption of critical perspectives and the implementation of student-identity affirming practices.

### **Are SETPPs Preparing Educators to Work With Diverse Groups Of Students?**

SETPPs have not typically prepared special educators to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners or disrupt systems of exclusion related to multiple and intersecting identity markers (González et al., 2023; More et al., 2016). For example, studies have shown that SETCs tend to privilege dis/ability identity over other aspects of identity (Boveda & Aronson, 2019). SETCs are also better able to discuss dis/ability than various other identity markers or to articulate an intersectional lens in relation to their role as future educators. Further, Chu and Garcia (2014) reported survey results illustrating a relationship between teacher preparation that explicitly prepares special educators to work with culturally and linguistically diverse learners and special educators' reported self-efficacy for serving such students. Without intentional preparation, educators perpetuate educational

inequities such as disproportionality. For instance, the disproportionate representation of multilingual learners and Students of Color in special education settings is well-documented (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Cioè-Peña, 2022a). Children of Color and students who have been marginalized due to their intersecting identities frequently encounter exclusion and are disciplined at disproportionate rates in school settings (Annamma et al., 2013). SETPPs are positioned to disrupt iniquitous teaching practices by critically evaluating their curricula, centering anti-oppressive practices, and attending to intersectionality.

### **What Is Intersectionality?**

Social markers of identity have commonly been addressed in isolation in scholarship and policy (Hancock, 2007). Treating social identities as mutually exclusive, rather than attending to how multiple identities interact and shape experiences, ignores differences that exist within groups (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). This can lead to fragmented understandings of identity that perpetuate deficit narratives based on a single marker and obscure the influence of explicit and implicit bias embedded in structures and communities (McCray & Waitoller, 2023). Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality to describe the ways in which marginalization across multiple identity markers (e.g., race, gender, dis/ability, class, sexual orientation, immigrant status) intersects to create unique and layered experiences. Scholars have called for increased attention to intersectionality as a means to disrupt essentialized views of groups aligned by single identity markers as well as to provide a framework for scholarship in teacher education (Pugach et al., 2019).

### **Why Do We Need Anti-Oppressive Educators?**

Scholars have described the ways in

which systemic oppression presents across areas of specialization and preparation in education. Daniels and Varghese (2019) described how in-service teachers and TPPs often reify oppression through the continual centering and normalization of whiteness, as well as by upholding dominant forms of English as the norm. Likewise, Dunham and Alexander (2022) found that general education TCs reflected on their various identity markers in isolation (commenting on race, gender, religion, dis/ability, and, to a lesser degree, class) as they engaged in an assignment exploring students' literate identities. Scholarship in bilingual and early childhood education has shown that in-service teachers' racial and linguistic identities and views of language influence the ways in which they perceive students and inform their instructional decision-making (Farr & Song, 2011; Han et al., 2011). Similar relationships have been noted relative to TCs' understanding of dis/ability. Beneke and Cheatham (2020) found that white, nondisabled early childhood SETCs resisted engaging young children in meaningful discussions of race or dis/ability during book reading. These actions can be interpreted as moves to conserve the racial and ability hierarchies rather than confront oppression in educational settings.

Along with avoiding certain aspects of identity, some studies have shown that TCs are resistant to discussions of intersectionality. In a small qualitative study of secondary general education TCs, Perouse-Harvey (2022) reported that when participating in coursework on dis/ability critical race theory and intersectionality, white, nondisabled male TCs more frequently demonstrated deflection and resistance during group discussions. Even when teacher candidates were committed to inclusive education, Vavrus (2009) found that general education TCs felt uncomfortable

and unprepared to engage their students in discussions about gender and sexuality. Hyland (2010) and Shelton and Barnes (2016) found that although TCs engaged in discussion exploring sexual orientation and race with a social justice orientation, they resisted exploring sexual orientation as an identity that can intersect with race and lead one to experience multiple forms of marginalization simultaneously. Shelton and Barnes posit that some TCs have historicized race and/or sexual orientation, expressing views that related forms of oppression are no longer relevant social justice issues. Across the work of scholars, TCs appear to experience barriers to understanding intersectionality and adopting critical perspectives.

Collectively, these findings suggest that TCs avoid or are unable to engage in critical reflection surrounding identity. Perouse-Harvey (2022) describes this pattern of resistance as TCs attempt to distract, redirect, or interrupt critical moments to maintain dominant perspectives on race and ability. TCs and SETCs may lack the required self-awareness of their own identities (Vavrus, 2009) or the pedagogical knowledge and vocabulary to engage children in discussions about identity and intersectionality (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020). Therefore, SETPPs must identify and implement effective strategies for cultivating critical perspectives within SETCs and fostering the development of culturally and linguistically sustaining anti-oppressive pedagogy.

### **How Can TPPs Develop Anti-Oppressive Educators?**

TPPs have the potential to help TCs become anti-oppressive educators by developing critical perspectives and shifting TCs' beliefs about students, whether they are preparing to teach in general, special, or bilingual/English as a second language positions (Dunham & Alexander, 2022; Hancock et al., 2021;

Vavrus, 2009). Engaging TCs in identity work and self-reflection to examine their own cultural and dis/ability identities is a critical feature of effective preparation (Li, 2013). When TCs are intentionally prepared to examine identity, they can become "cultural workers" capable of learning about their students' cultural practices and lived experiences and effectively integrating this knowledge into the classroom while understanding the broader socio-political context in which their students are situated (Li, 2013, p. 137). Developing critical perspectives and becoming "cultural workers" involves both identity work and cultivating deep pedagogical knowledge. TPPs and SETPPs are positioned to engage TCs in critical reflection and identity development through their selected curricula and placement experiences (McCray & Waitoller, 2023).

Many scholars have called for TPPs to prepare general and special educators to understand intersectionality and disrupt systems of oppression within schools (Annamma et al., 2013; Freire, 1970; Li, 2013; McCray & Waitoller, 2023). Other scholars have invoked TPPs to address a variety of identity markers, including gender identity (Blair & Deckman, 2019), heteronormativity and cisnormativity (McEntarfer, 2016), and increased attention to students who are immigrants and children of immigrants (Goodwin, 2017; Sattin-Bajaj et al., 2023). Within special education, scholars have encouraged SETPPs to question medical models of dis/ability and develop critical consciousness on the interdependent nature of ableism and racism within schools (Annamma et al., 2013; Perouse-Harvey, 2022). In response, SETPPs must prepare SETCs to broadly examine the ways in which systems of inequity are upheld and explore how these systems impact marginalized individuals in the interest of preparing SETCs to disrupt such inequities (Annamma & Morrison,

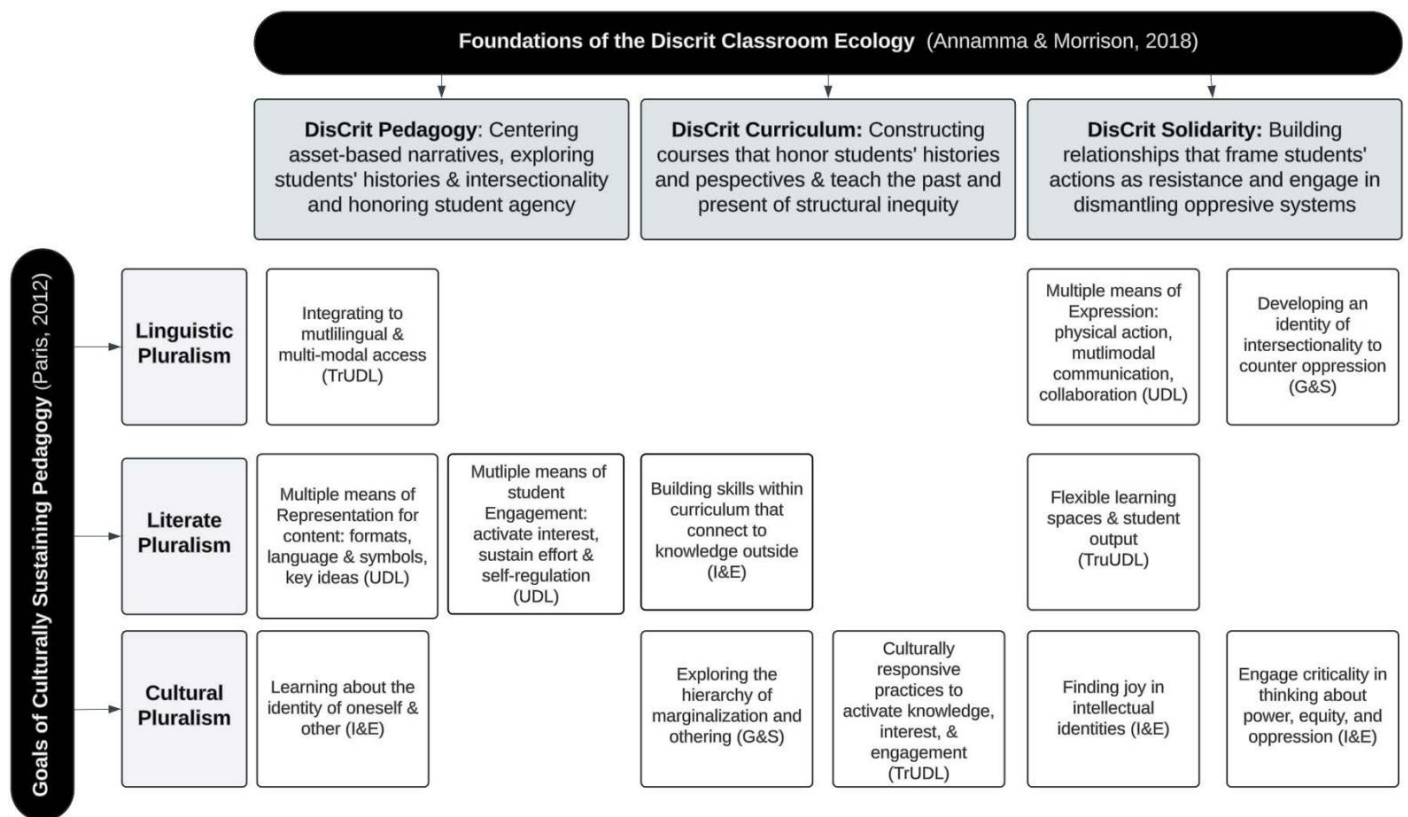
2018; Cochran-Smith, 2023; Sobel et al., 2011). SETPPs may respond by offering programming that intentionally weaves social constructs, conceptual frameworks, and reflective exercises throughout coursework and teaching practice (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Hancock et al., 2021). As we prepare candidates to work collaboratively with general educators, SETPPs must also teach about differences in ways that equip special educators with the skills to work with diverse learners who have been multiply marginalized.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Addressing systemic oppression in special education teacher preparation requires an examination of the learning environment. Learning environments are shaped by curriculum, pedagogy, relationships, and the larger sociological contexts that influence each factor (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Thus, we draw upon scholarship that attends to specific identity markers and intersectionality. Our work is situated within scholarship describing student identity-affirming (Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy; Paris, 2012), anti-ableist, and anti-racist pedagogies (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Additionally, we draw from literature pertaining to identity and equity (I&E; Muhammad & Mosley, 2021), gender and sexuality inclusive pedagogies (G&S; Hyland, 2010), accessibility via Universal Design for Learning (UDL; CAST, 2018) and inclusive language practices via translanguaging UDL, or TrUDL (Cioè-Peña, 2022b).

Our conceptual framework positions the learning environment and teacher pedagogy as a matrix, with intersectionality operating as a convergence between the learner's identities and how they exist in the learning environment curated by educators. This work is aligned to scholarship in dis/ability critical race theory (DisCrit), which

**FIGURE 1:** Conceptual Framework: Learning Environment and Pedagogy Matrix



provides a framework specifically for examining the intersection between race and dis/ability (Annamma et al., 2013). DisCrit draws upon dis/ability studies and critical race theory, offering a means for understanding the ways in which race and dis/ability are co-constructed and forming a lens through which intersecting forms of oppression (i.e., racism and ableism) may be understood. We envision anti-oppressive pedagogy as an application of DisCrit perspectives by positioning special education teacher educators (SETEs) to interrogate beliefs and model asset-based practices for learners.

Along the horizontal axis, we have positioned features of Annamma and Morrison's (2018) DisCrit Classroom Ecology, which has been proposed as a framework to resist deficit narratives pertaining to Students of Color who have been multiply marginalized. This

is done by ensuring teachers know their students, teach with students' gifts in mind, which are unique to Children of Color who have been multiply marginalized, and view students' actions as forms of resistance. The DisCrit Classroom Ecology features three key domains (i.e., DisCrit Pedagogy, DisCrit Curriculum, and DisCrit Solidarity) that create a system of interactions between knowledge generation, relationships, and content that can be leveraged to disrupt oppression and reimagine education (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). DisCrit Pedagogy positions students as knowledge generators by highlighting students' abilities and reframing features of their identity as assets. DisCrit Curriculum explicitly addresses the history of inequity and injustice experienced by multiply marginalized individuals in our society and centers the achievements and intellectual contributions of

Communities of Color. Lastly, DisCrit Solidarity highlights the importance of authentic relationships between students and educators. Educators act in solidarity by rejecting oppression and exclusion in favor of shared power and resistance with students (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). We arranged DisCrit Pedagogy, DisCrit Curriculum, and DisCrit Solidarity as key features of the anti-oppressive learning environment that can be addressed through teacher action.

On the opposing axis, we situated learner outcomes outlined within Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP; Paris, 2012). CSP is conceptualized as a praxis for encouraging dexterity and competence in students' own communities while building competence in the dominant culture (Paris, 2012). This is achieved through linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism that connects identity and cultural practices within classrooms.

Students are encouraged to integrate their multicultural identities and heritage through language, cultural practices, and traditions to enrich the shared learning across the broader student communities (Paris, 2012). This creates a dynamic and multifaceted mosaic of perspectives and lived experiences. In CSP, instruction is responsive to students' various ways of knowing and being, and it intentionally seeks to sustain students' cultural and linguistic practices within the classroom. Within the bounds of student identity and teacher praxis, we positioned frameworks of intersectionality that explore the ways in which educators can design courses that allow students to resist oppression and teachers to act in solidarity (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017). Figure 1 illustrates this matrix and the additional frameworks of intersectionality that have informed our conceptualization of anti-oppressive pedagogy and the development of the tool, *A Guided Reflection of Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework*. The following sections will outline key scholarship that has examined intersectionality, racism, and ableism in teacher preparation. These findings directed the design and development of our tool.

### **Positionality**

As recommended by Boveda and Annamma (2021), our intersectional identities and positionalities are woven throughout the manuscript in an attempt to expose our privilege and center the knowledge and perspectives of individuals and communities who have long been marginalized. Two of the authors identify as white, and another identifies as holding a mixed Latine-white identity. We are all native English speakers, with two authors speaking Spanish as a second language. Two authors identify as dis/abled and as parents to children receiving special education services.

While we all consider ourselves allies and partners in solidarity, none of us identify as members of the LGBTQ+ or immigrant communities. Our experiences, perspectives, and intersectional identities as TEs drive our commitment to advance equity for all students while remaining engaged as learners in this area.

### **Support for Centering Justice in SETPP Coursework**

In many cases, SETPPs have not prepared teachers to effectively meet the needs of students with diverse identities (Annamma et al., 2013; Pugach et al., 2021). If we are to foreground social justice in special education, SETEs must craft courses that prepare SETCs to work in diverse settings, recognize the ways in which systemic oppression operates, and develop tools and strategies for disrupting systems. Self-reflection, coursework activities, and cross-cultural experiences have been identified as tools for developing cultural competence in pre-service general and special education TCs (McCray & Waitoller, 2023). Recognizing the need to prioritize these experiences in TPPs, we propose a tool, *A Guided Reflection of Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework*, to support SETEs within SETPPs in reflective evaluation of their coursework. This tool guides SETEs through the design or revision of course syllabi to center anti-oppressive practices and advance equity. Before introducing the tool, we describe our intersectional framework and review the literature that directly informed the development of our tool.

### **Addressing Intersectionality in Teacher Education**

Research has revealed the importance of critically examining students' and teachers' intersecting identity markers (Boveda & Aronson, 2019). We draw upon scholarship that does not always include dis/ability directly, given that

dis/ability has typically been absent from the literature examining social justice in teacher preparation, and when it is included, it is typically viewed as an isolated identity marker rather than through an intersectional lens (González et al., 2023; Pugach et al., 2021). Recently, intersectional lenses, including dis/ability, have been applied in special education teacher education scholarship (e.g., Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Boveda & Aronson, 2019; McCray & Waitoller, 2023). McCray and Waitoller (2023) cautioned that focusing on only one aspect of student identities, like dis/ability, can lead pre-service teachers to overlook learning barriers created by intersecting forms of marginalization. In practice, this can lead to prioritizing certain supports and services for students in accordance with a false hierarchy of needs, such as prioritizing speech and language services over multilingual instruction (Cioè-Peña, 2020; McCray & Waitoller, 2023). Given the relationship between identity and practice (Farr & Song, 2011; Beneke & Cheatham, 2020), it is imperative for SETEs to consider the intersectional identities among both pre-service teachers and their students. While not all prior research has examined intersectionality within SETPPs, the work occurring in teacher preparation broadly provides valuable insight into teacher preparation that SETPPs may benefit from directly.

Teacher education scholarship has shown that TCs require support to develop critical perspectives, understand intersectionality, and learn to interrogate instructional practices for equity and inclusion (Boveda & Aronson, 2019; Dunham & Alexander, 2022). Scholars have made several recommendations based upon these findings. Blair and Deckman (2019) recommend supporting TCs to examine gender norms beyond

school settings to understand cultural views of gender, both independently and through an intersectional lens. They recommend giving TCs more opportunities to (a) examine their own perspectives, (b) understand the experiences of transgender and gender creative individuals, and (c) recognize how heteronormative systems of oppression operate (Blair & Deckman, 2019). Hyland (2010) further recommends integrating the role of educators into classroom discussions of identity, exploring this role in relation to intersectional markers. To foster the development of critical perspectives and promote the internalization of knowledge, SETEs must engage students in these explorations throughout courses across their SETPPs.

Along with race and gender, teachers must be supported to challenge oppressive views and practices related to language and immigration status. TCs should be prepared to support bilingualism and biliteracy by supporting cross-linguistic transfer, or making connections across languages, and incorporating translanguaging (Cioè-Peña, 2022b; Goodwin, 2017). Translanguaging describes the ways in which multilingual individuals employ all of their linguistic knowledge to express themselves and make meaning (Cioè-Peña, 2022b). TCs should explore the ways in which perceptions of language intersect with perceptions of race, dis/ability, and immigration (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Cioè-Peña, 2022b; Goodwin, 2017). TCs should also be supported to understand the rich diversity that exists within immigrant communities (Goodwin, 2017) and recognize the ways in which immigration policy influences home-school partnerships (Sattin-Bajaj et al., 2021). TEs must engage students in explorations of intersectionality through guided discussion, self-reflection, and coursework activities throughout their TPPs.

### **Addressing Anti-Racist Teaching in Teacher Education**

Race is central to this work. White TCs may fail to see how they benefit from whiteness and lack the preparation to take up anti-racist approaches to teaching (Utt & Tochluk, 2020). While TCs may be able to recognize some forms of racism and how they operate, other forms may be more challenging to grasp. For instance, King defines dysconscious racism as “a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges” (1991, p. 135). Others describe how dysconscious racism is perpetuated through unchallenged assumptions about People of Color, even while superficially celebrating diversity (Love, 2020), and through the influence of meritocracy (Affolter, 2019). As TCs explore intersectionality, Utt and Tochluk (2020) suggest that TPPs help white TCs make sense of these concepts by fostering critical consciousness and a positive white racial identity so TCs can more effectively implement anti-oppressive practices. They suggest TPPs can cultivate such identities by engaging white TCs in deep self-reflection to analyze privilege and microaggressions, learn the history of anti-racism and social justice, explore and develop intersectional identities, and commit to accountability. By incorporating this work into SETPPs, SETEs can encourage white TCs to develop anti-racist identities.

Scholarship in teacher education has begun to explore anti-racist teacher preparation. Anti-racist teaching disrupts and challenges racism by exposing how racism operates systemically and how it impacts People of Color in overt and less obvious ways (Affolter, 2019). Affolter (2019) draws on the work of King and Chandler (2016) to make a distinction between non-racist and anti-racist. While non-racist offers a passive way of distancing oneself from racists beliefs

or acts, an anti-racist stance involves actively rejecting racism in all its manifestations at an institutional level (King & Chandler, 2016). Kishimoto (2018) emphasizes individual responsibility in dismantling racism and that anti-racist pedagogy should preclude individuals from perpetuating the institution of racism. To support TCs in taking responsibility and making sense of the ways in which racism operates, TEs can facilitate discussions about race and equity that encourage collective unpacking and allow for multiple perspectives, even when they become tense or uncomfortable for teachers or students (Picower, 2021). This work can be supported by explicitly centering race in coursework, leaving space for conflict to occur, and avoiding race evasion. These practices can be infused throughout courses and programs. For instance, Hancock et al. (2021) explained how intentional design in one program allowed them to effectively prepare TCs to meet licensure standards while simultaneously learning to implement anti-oppressive practices. They did so by applying DisCrit Classroom Ecology to fieldwork expectations for early childhood TCs. This scholarship suggests that TPPs, including SETPPs, have great potential to shape teachers' beliefs and practices to advance equity.

### **Addressing Anti-Ableist Teaching in Teacher Education**

Disrupting ableism is a critical aspect of anti-oppressive pedagogy. Prior research has documented that TCs tended to focus on dis/ability as a challenge or individual characteristic, rather than as an intersectional identity marker (Boveda & Aronson, 2019; McCray & Waitoller, 2023). Part of this work involves designing accessible instruction, allowing for full participation in the curriculum. The principles of UDL (CAST, 2018) can guide TEs in design-

ing accessible courses. UDL offers a framework for reducing barriers to learning through three guidelines: multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression (See Figure 1, or CAST, 2018 for a review). Passman and Green (2009) described how utilizing UDL to design courses can address TCs' accessibility needs and serve as a model for accessible and inclusive instruction. They described how they aligned syllabi with the core principles of UDL and presented a syllabus template that TEs can use to engage in similar work. Evans and colleagues (2010) also found that SETCs enrolled in a SETPP implementing UDL were better able to reduce barriers to learning in their own instruction, reiterating the importance of modeling accessibility in TPPs. In this program, instructors applied the principles of UDL in coursework to model its implementation and utilized case studies to help SETCs develop an understanding of UDL within classroom practices. In these ways, SETEs have supported SETCs in effectively designing instruction aligned with the principles of UDL.

Anti-ableism also involves recognizing how ableism presents systemically and developing a repertoire of strategies for resistance. One form of resistance is to enact inclusion. Within TPPs that model and encourage inclusive practices, TCs have demonstrated increased use of practices that promote inclusion in their own teaching. One such TPP promoted inclusive pedagogies by centering identity and connecting theory and practice across their curriculum (Engelbrecht & Ekins, 2017). Collaborative learning across TPPs through coursework and creating opportunities for experiential learning in inclusive fieldwork settings can also provide SETCs with contexts for learning about diversity and ability (McCray & Waitoller, 2023). Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) further encourage

expanding notions of normality, challenging oppressive views of dis/ability, and developing an understanding of how ableism operates. They define ableism as "the belief that being non-disabled, 'able-bodied,' or 'able-minded' is inherently better than having a dis/ability or impairment" (p. 71). Baglieri and Lalvani describe the importance of helping educators develop positive attitudes toward students with dis/abilities to disrupt the marginalization of dis/abled students. TCs should explore their own views of dis/ability and be prepared to help children engage in discussion of dis/ability. Children notice differences related to dis/ability and other identity markers and benefit from engaging in meaningful dialogue about these observations (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020). SETEs should provide examples of modeling anti-ableist language and discussing how dis/ability relates to core content. By embedding these opportunities, TCs can envision how they might apply these approaches in their future classrooms (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020).

### **DESIGNING SYLLABI TO CREATE ANTI-OPPRESSIVE COURSES**

Centering anti-oppressive practices within TPPs requires a concerted effort among faculty at the program level (Goodwin, 2017; Sobel et al., 2011). However, in this paper, we emphasize the agency instructors have when designing their own courses and syllabi (Noguera & Alicea, 2021). This reflects an understanding that both institutions and individuals are responsible for enacting change to disrupt systems of oppression (Kishimoto, 2018). Conscious course design is essential to centering anti-oppressive practices. While course design includes many components, syllabi provide a foundation as the guiding document for each course, making them an important aspect of

overall program design (Sobel et al., 2011). Syllabi indicate whose knowledge is privileged and reflect priorities within a course (Zidani, 2021). Effective courses integrate anti-oppressive content throughout the curriculum rather than simply highlighting certain identities or topics in a featured lesson (Hyland, 2010; Kishimoto, 2018). Syllabi that do not center anti-oppressive practices systematically (re)create and perpetuate systems of oppression through erasure and evasiveness (Gorski et al., 2013; Pugach et al., 2019). This erasure has been observed within TPPs relative to culture, race, language, immigration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and dis/ability (Goodwin, 2017; Gorski et al., 2013; More et al., 2016; Pugach et al., 2019). This absence of diversity in the curriculum is problematic. Prior works have recommended that TPPs (a) integrate social justice content across the curriculum, (b) model the use of inclusive and anti-oppressive practices, (c) engage TCs in ongoing identity work with an emphasis on intersectionality, and (d) support TCs in learning to recognize and disrupt systems of oppression when planning teacher preparation courses (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Dunham & Alexander, 2022; Kishimoto, 2018). Through careful development and design of course syllabi, SETEs can select and prepare content that addresses these recommendations consistently across programming.

For TEs to enact change at the individual level, they must recognize where power and privilege operate within their courses and broader areas of expertise (Blakeney, 2005; Boveda & Annamma, 2023). As SETEs examine their content area and course design, they can engage in critical reflection by identifying where diverse perspectives are missing and incorporating materials, video content, or research created by Scholars of Color.

During instruction, SETEs can model and share examples of what it might look like to engage with an anti-oppressive curriculum (Benke & Cheatham, 2020). This requires TEs to learn about TCs' identities and understandings of diversity (Li, 2013). TEs should unpack candidates' views and include various forms of knowledge within their own conceptions of TCs' intersectional identities. Exploring these aspects of diversity requires TCs to be engaged in ongoing reflection, examining their own identities to support the learning process and to help TEs in uncovering their TCs' existing beliefs related to diversity (Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Personal narratives, autoethnography, and individual reflections can serve as powerful tools for developing critical consciousness in TCs (Powell et al., 2023; Vavrus, 2009). The authors' identities played an important role throughout the theoretical framing and development of this tool. All three authors are early career scholars committed to advancing equity within TPPs and K-12 educational settings. The first author is a faculty member in a large SETPP. The other authors are doctoral candidates pursuing work in special education teacher preparation. Our experiences with institutional hierarchy, bias, and power in higher education became catalysts for exploring how syllabi and course design can further systemic change.

### **MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: ENACTING RESISTANCE THROUGH REFLECTION**

While anti-oppressive practices have been proposed, they often isolate aspects of identity (Hancock, 2007) and have not been widely adopted within SETPPs (González et al., 2023; More et al., 2016). As new and emerging scholars, we are committed to disrupting systems of exclusion and oppression in TPPs. As reviewed, many scholars have advocated

for adopting lenses of intersectionality (e.g., Pugach et al., 2019) and a dynamic process for integrating anti-oppressive practices in TPPs (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017). Other scholars have begun to enact positive change through the development of educational resources for advancing social justice through tools like the Equity-Minded Syllabus Review sponsored by the University of Southern California or the Decolonize Your Syllabus checklist from Mercer University. Related scholarship in special education has presented a syllabus template that foregrounds UDL (Passman & Green, 2009) and considers intersectionality in co-teaching models (Boveda & Weinberg, 2020). Boveda and Weinberg (2020) developed the Intersectionally Conscious Collaboration (ICC) Protocol Teacher Education Version 1, a tool that supports SETEs in improving their classroom instruction by centering intersectionality. Acting as a complement to these instructional resources, our tool differs from these in that it is meant to support course and content (re)design by grounding course content and syllabi development in anti-oppressive pedagogy as it relates to SETPPs. We offer A Guided Reflection of Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework as an avenue to begin exploration into privilege, intersectionality, and institutional power in SETPPs. We acknowledge that we hold many privileges, but in naming and reflecting upon our identities and commitments to improving teacher preparation, we hope to disrupt systems of inequity in education through a lens that centers intersectionality for learners who have been labeled as dis/abled. With our tool, we aim to personally invite and encourage other SETEs to intentionally design courses with anti-oppressive practices at their core. Through our own experiences as students and instructors in SETPPs, we recognize that a practi-

cal tool guiding reflection can support SETEs in disrupting oppression through self-reflection, agency, and solidarity.

### **GUIDED REFLECTION TOOL**

Our tool consists of 12 reflection questions to guide novice and veteran scholars in applying critical lenses when designing, implementing, or revising course syllabi in SETPPs. Acknowledging the iterative nature of course design, we designed this tool to flexibly meet the needs of SETEs, individually or within SETPPs. This tool can support curriculum development, initial course design, or reimagination of existing courses within programs. We hope the use of this tool will promote introspection and serve as a catalyst for SETEs to further their learning. We caution against using it as a checklist or list of criteria for removing bias from courses, as this approach oversimplifies the nature of systemic oppression and ignores the ongoing nature of anti-oppressive practice, making it likely to reinforce the very oppressive structures that we are aiming to disrupt. While we do not expect that every course will address all forms of oppression, we do hope this tool will help SETEs (a) identify opportunities to increase representation, (b) strengthen SETCs' understandings of intersectionality, (c) recognize the ways in which systems of oppression operate within schools and society, and (d) resist systems of oppression in SETPPs to benefit SETCs and their future students.

### **Key Aspects of Anti-Oppressive Course Design**

Resisting oppression requires a commitment to intentional and ongoing engagement (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Kishimoto, 2018). Our tool invites SETEs to critically evaluate their course content, relationships with students, and use of instructional strategies through an anti-oppressive lens. As

**TABLE 2:** Guided Reflection on Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework

Domain	Anchor Questions	Follow-up Prompts
IDENTITY	<i>How will I curate content that incorporates diverse identities, authors, and perspectives relative to key course objectives throughout the syllabus?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where will I feature authors, presenters, and media that includes diversity in ability, gender, sexual orientation, language, race, religion, and social class?</li> <li>Where will I center diverse perspectives and identities in connection to key course concepts? Am I able to select materials that highlight intersectionality?</li> <li>Where will I include strategies for engaging in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy or supporting diverse learners?</li> </ul>
	<i>In what ways am I planning to learn about students' identities and perceptions of variability?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will I understand how my teacher candidates are reflecting upon their own identities and learning? How might I challenge their thinking as the course progresses?</li> <li>How will I learn about my teacher candidates' accessibility needs and learning preferences?</li> <li>How will I learn about my teacher candidates' initial perceptions of their students and course topics and concepts?</li> </ul>
	<i>Where will I create opportunities to include teacher candidates' multiple and intersecting identities within the curriculum?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where will I include opportunities for teacher candidates to draw upon their multiple and intersecting identities when submitting written or recorded assignments?</li> <li>Where will I include opportunities for teacher candidates to draw upon their multiple and intersecting identities in discussion and group activities during class?</li> <li>How will I cultivate a classroom community in which teacher candidates feel comfortable sharing and reflecting upon their own identities and experiences?</li> </ul>
	<i>How do my identity markers relate to my content and my learners, and how does that influence my teaching of key concepts?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How have I explored my own identity in relation to the content and teacher candidates that I teach?</li> <li>What do I understand about my own identity in relation to the priorities I establish for learning?</li> <li>What areas can I identify for further learning and how do I plan to continue this work?</li> </ul>
POWER & PRIVILEGE	<i>How do power and privilege operate within this course?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where will I explore the intersections of racism, ableism, heteronormativity, gender norms, and other forms of oppression within this course?</li> <li>What steps have I taken to notice and effectively address microaggressions? How will I consider power and privilege moving forward?</li> </ul>
	<i>How am I considering institutional histories and the impacts of oppression related to course content?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will I proactively address harm caused by historical injustice, institutional histories, and microaggressions embedded in course content?</li> <li>How will I name the harmful histories represented in my field or institution?</li> </ul>
	<i>What changes will I make to disrupt harmful narratives and dominant ideologies in course content?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What agency do I have in modifying central themes and ideologies represented in the field? How will I enact this agency?</li> <li>How might I be reifying and replicating dominant cultural norms? What will I do with this information?</li> </ul>
	<i>How do I anticipate my professional identity and power within my institution will influence my interactions with students?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How have I reflected on my institutional role and how it is perceived by my teacher candidates?</li> <li>How do I plan to continue this work?</li> <li>How will I balance this in my teaching, communication, and relationships with teacher candidates?</li> <li>Where will I seek input from students regarding course policies, procedures, and content to include student voice?</li> </ul>
ACCESSIBILITY, EQUITY, & INSTRUCTION	<i>How will I design content and course activities with an anti-oppressive stance?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When can I engage in anti-oppressive practices? When have I previously missed opportunities?</li> <li>Where can I include explicit examples and models of anti-oppressive curriculum?</li> </ul>
	<i>In what ways will I design instructional activities that center and sustain my students' intersectional identities?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will I honor teacher candidates' diverse ways of demonstrating knowledge and engagement?</li> <li>How will I prepare instruction to facilitate culturally relevant ways of engaging in learning content?</li> </ul>
	<i>How will I prioritize equity and universal design in my own teaching practice?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How have I prioritized equity and universal design in the past? Moving forward, how will I plan instruction that uses multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression?</li> <li>To what extent are my planned grading policies aligned with anti-oppressive practices?</li> <li>How will I attend to diverse and intersectional identity markers in course learning activities?</li> </ul>
	<i>What steps will I take to increase accessibility?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will I make lesson content and materials accessible?</li> <li>How will I implement instructional technology to support students? How will I design flexible work products for submissions?</li> <li>How will I gather and reflect on feedback from teacher candidates about my course accessibility?</li> </ul>

such, we identified three key aspects for consideration throughout the process of anti-oppressive course design: (a) Identity, (b) Power and Privilege, and (c) Accessibility, Equity, and Instruction. These concepts are aligned to our matrix of DisCrit Classroom Ecology and CSP and correlated to the principles of each of the intersectional frameworks within our matrix (see Figure 1). Each section includes four broad anchor questions to generate inspiration and two to four follow-up prompts with specific suggestions for reflection. The guided reflection tool with anchor questions and prompts is presented in Table 1.

### **Identity**

SETEs should critically reflect on how their own beliefs and intersectional identities influence their teaching and course design (Milner, 2010; Utt & Tochluk, 2020). This section invites SETEs to curate a curriculum that highlights visibility and representation and develops their knowledge of students' strengths and identities through asset-based pedagogies (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Muhammad & Mosley, 2021). This includes using culturally sustaining strategies to uncover students' cultural and linguistic identities (Cioè-Peña, 2017; Paris, 2012). The anchor questions are meant to promote reflection on the relationships between SETEs, SETCs, and course content.

### **Power and Privilege**

By evaluating how power and privilege are represented in coursework, SETEs can explore the histories and injustices experienced by those who have been multiply marginalized and create opportunities for resistance and solidarity with their students (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). As a first step, SETEs should interrogate their own identities and power in relation to the course, syllabi, teaching assistants, and

students (Boveda & Annamma, 2021; Hyland, 2010). This section offers SETEs the chance to consider their own agency in countering microaggressions in their courses, replicating dominant cultural norms in content, or teaching harmful histories without adequately addressing injustices. Likewise, SETEs can leverage these histories to provoke critical discussions of power, equity, and identity in education (Muhammad & Mosley, 2021).

### **Accessibility, Equity, and Instruction**

Accessible instruction guides SETEs to incorporate all three elements of the DisCrit Classroom Ecology: pedagogy, curriculum, and solidarity (Annamma & Morrison, 2018) by designing courses grounded in principles of UDL, TrUDL, and CSP. In addition to concrete steps for including multiple means of representation and expression, SETEs can model culturally sustaining practices and authentic relationship building with their SETCs (CAST, 2018; Cioè-Peña, 2022b; Paris, 2012). These actions increase SETCs' motivation to reflect on their abilities, participate in flexible knowledge generation, and experience anti-oppressive practices in context (Cioè-Peña, 2017). Every learner should have the opportunity to access, participate, and communicate their thinking in authentic and culturally responsive ways.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFLECTION**

The Guided Reflection for Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework tool is intended to be a resource to support SETEs' efforts to engage in meaningful syllabus development. We reiterate that this tool is not a checklist or an exhaustive list of exploratory questions but rather an entry into equity and social justice work for SETEs reimagining teacher preparation. We encourage

SETEs to approach syllabi and course design as an iterative process. SETEs may use this tool collaboratively across SETPPs or as a catalyst for professional development. SETEs might start by selecting one key aspect of the tool to focus on each semester or simply using the guided reflection to encourage their own identity development work. We also recommend that SETEs consider partnering with a colleague or affinity group to discuss reflections. By claiming our own agency as SETEs in curating teacher preparation coursework, we can adjust our own practices to move toward justice and equity in our SETPPs.

If we are to enact change to disrupt systemic oppression in schools, SETEs must intentionally prepare SETCs to enact anti-oppressive pedagogy. The Guided Reflection for Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework tool offers a resource that may guide SETEs through the process of creating or redesigning syllabi to drive this important and ongoing work. In conclusion, we remind SETEs that we are all evolving in our knowledge of self, others, and the systems of oppression that operate within education. Through honest reflection and small acts of agency, we can begin to disrupt the systems that replicate oppression in higher education.

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