

Building Teacher Candidate's Capacity to Disrupt Socialized Niceness Through Practice-Based Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Despite decades of resistance, activism, legislative action, and changes in mindset, special education continues to be affected by historical inequities that impact students' access to a free and appropriate education. To effectively serve and advocate for their students, it is critical for special education teacher candidates (TCs) to have the skills needed to recognize and disrupt these inequities, even (especially) when doing so may cause discomfort for themselves or their colleagues. Learning to recognize and work through that discomfort, one of the impacts of socialized niceness, is often lacking from educator preparation programs (EPPs). This article presents practice-based teacher education (PBTE), a framework designed to build novice teachers' skills for intellectually-rich teaching, as one method EPPs can employ to empower TCs to effectively disrupt socialized niceness in the name of equity for all students.

KEYWORDS

Inequity, practice-based teacher education, socialized niceness, special education

Most special education teachers choose their specialty because of a passion for and dedication to helping remove barriers to an excellent education for students with disabilities. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) generally prepare them well with regards to planning, teaching, assessing, writing individualized education plans (IEPs), and the basics of collaboration, all of which are core elements of the role. Special education teachers face myriad challenges in advocating for and ensuring access and inclusion for students with disabilities—challenges for which many are not adequately prepared.

The field of special education itself was formed after a history of excluding people with disabilities from society and schools (Myers, 2021). The move to more inclusive practices came through decades of activism, resistance, cultural attitude shifts, and ultimately, legislation, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004; Myers, 2021). While more overt forms of exclusion—institutionalization, separate schools, basement classrooms—have largely diminished, as with other forms of oppression and marginalization, the vestiges remain in more insidious systems and structures.

For example, students with disabilities, who make up approximately 13% of the total student population, are far more likely to face restraint (80% of instances), seclusion (77% of instances), or exclusionary discipline practices such as in- and out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Students with disabilities are also consistently held to lower academic expectations and low-cognitive work (Gershenson et al., 2015). Resistance to inclusion stems from the belief that it is the special educators' job to teach children receiving specialized services, time constraints, or general educators' insecurities about their own abilities (Weisling & Toson, in-press). Finally, students with disabilities are more likely to be left out of school activities such as extra recess, class celebrations, and field trips (Weisling et al., in preparation).

Special education teachers are up to 46% more likely than their general education peers to leave the field (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). They may be

assigned caseloads that are unreasonably high or more co-teaching partners than are realistic for effective collaboration, be left out of grade-level meetings, or attend professional development that is not reflective of their needs (Kelly et al., 2023). These inequities are often exacerbated when the students with disabilities being served are also students of color, learning English as an additional language, and/or living in poverty-impacted communities (Marisco, 2022).

These are not merely occasional situations that “crop up” but are common practices reflecting institutional and systematic exclusion experienced by students with disabilities and special educators (Weisling & Toson, in-press). If special education teachers attempt to address these inequities with their colleagues and administrators, they are often censured and viewed as “not a team player” or “obstructionist.” In other cases, colleagues with whom these conversations are happening may feel uncomfortable by them and come to view the special educator as “mean” or “aggressive.” Further, special educators themselves may feel uncomfortable speaking up to colleagues for fear of appearing “disrespectful” or a “squeaky wheel” who may be fired or punished in other ways, such as having other duties added to their plate, being assigned the “most challenging” students, and so forth (Weisling & Toson, in-press). As a result, special educators receive subtle and overt forms of reprisal, such as eye-rolling, sighing when they speak up, being left out of meetings, and formal censure. Due to fear of such reprisal (DiAngelo, 2021; Liera, 2020; Orozco, 2019) and because they have limited readiness to effectively address such situations (Burke et al., 2016), many special education teachers opt not to engage or quickly revert to amenability, if they do.

On the surface, the intention to not

cause discomfort may seem like a desirable or expected individualized choice to maintain peace. In actuality, it reflects *socialized niceness* (Castagno, 2019; DiAngelo, 2021; Galman et al., 2010; Galman, 2019; Liera, 2020; Wegert & Charles, 2019). This is a patterned response that upholds detrimental “status quo” practices, allowing inequities to go unchecked and inadvertently maintaining the systems, pedagogies, and/or interactions that are problematic. Yet, despite the frequency with which special educators and children with disabilities experience exclusionary practices and barriers to access, and despite the ways that socialized niceness upholds these practices when teachers attempt to address them, there is limited readiness amongst special education teachers to advocate in ways that are most effective for their students (Burke et al., 2016; Weisling & Toson, in press).

To be clear, these inequities, injustices, barriers to access, and oppressive systems, policies, and practices need to be addressed systemically and systematically. Laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and professional guidelines such as the Council for Exceptional Children *Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Special Educators* demand both systemic change and for teachers to have the tools needed to advocate and instruct in accordance with the law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004; Council for Exceptional Children, 2024). Unfortunately, the wheels of change move slowly and as such, special education TCs must have tools to recognize and interrupt them as they occur. EPPs can prepare our special education TCs to be able to productively identify and navigate by teaching:

1. *What* socialized niceness is,
2. *How* and *why* it manifests in their daily lives, and

3. How to productively navigate through socialized niceness in the name of ensuring all students have positive, engaged, and meaningful experiences in and out of the classroom.

Failure to do so leaves it to chance that new special educators will understand the socialization forces, such as niceness, that position them to maintain the peace and the comfort of other adults in the building at the expense of children who deserve better.

This article presents one method for EPPs to employ to accomplish these goals: practice-based teacher education (PBTE). PBTE is a framework designed to build novice teachers’ knowledge and skills for intellectually-rich teaching. The full PBTE protocol, recommendations for use, and suggested resources are provided below.

POSITIONING OF SOLUTION IN EVIDENCE **Socialized Niceness**

Niceness is a socialization force that shapes beliefs, expectations, and interactions. Niceness prioritizes maintaining comfort and social approval, often by ignoring or avoiding conflict and controversy, and is manifested in many ways (Castagno, 2019; DiAngelo, 2021; Galman et al., 2010; Galman, 2019; Gardiner & Weisling, 2024; Liera, 2020; Wegert & Charles, 2019), some of which are explored in Table 1.

Worth noting, there is a difference between niceness as a socialization force and seeking to be a nice person, which can be a desirable trait. Particularly in education and other feminized professions, this distinction is especially important as *socialized niceness* is both expected and rewarded. As a consequence, even for the most well-intentioned teachers and school leaders, niceness conditions us to “not rock the boat” and can serve to censure those

TABLE 1: Characteristics of Socialized Niceness

- Being people-pleasing.
- Being passive, compliant and rule-following (even when silently disagreeing).
- Smoothing over tensions.
- Ignoring or downplaying concerns.
- Reframing feedback or critique to be more palatable, less “mean.”
- Retreating from or glossing over disagreement.
- Downplaying personal knowledge and experience.

who *do* push back by labeling them as “troublemakers,” “nasty,” and “not nice.” For example, when faced with an attendance policy that penalizes students with chronic illness, teachers with unexamined socialized niceness will offer “safe” critique (e.g., “I wonder if maybe we could reconsider this policy”), at best, or avoid surfacing the ableism, at worst, thereby leaving the policy untouched.

As a result of these deep socializations and the ideologies of “normal” that ensue, the impact of niceness is that difficult conversations are avoided, superficially engaged, or dropped (Liera, 2020; Orozco, 2019; Riemer, 2019; Wegert & Charles, 2019) and educators do not stand up for students, themselves, or minoritized communities (Galman, 2019; Riemer, 2019). Inequitable policies and practices are sustained, and the status quo goes largely unchallenged. In short, niceness in the teaching profession sustains ableist, cis-hetero-patriarchal, white, and meritocratic norms, leaving the status quo unchallenged (Castagno, 2019; Gardiner et al., 2023).

It is important to note that when teachers act in ableist, racist, imperialistic, cis-hetero-patriarchy, etc., ways, their behaviors are often the result of their years of socialization and the unexamined biases they carry. If asked, they would likely be adamant that they work for *all* students, even when their actions demonstrate exclusionary behavior

and deficit thinking. Further, in these moments, when we choose to resist socialized niceness in order to address inequities that are often internalized, this does not inherently require us or give us the latitude to be disrespectful or inauthentic to ourselves. We are not “calling out” people or actions. Instead, we are “calling them in” (see, for example, [Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In - Office of the Vice Provost for Institutional Inclusive Excellence](#)) to discuss and learn from instances of inequity and injustice without judgment, but from a deep desire for a more just and equitable future.

PBTE

PBTE is an instructional pedagogy used in EPPs, designed to help TCs bridge professional knowledge and effective enactment (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman et al., 2009; Grossman, 2018; Kavanagh & Danielson, 2020; Kazemi et al., 2016; Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2013). PBTE puts the complex *work* of teaching, and the underlying principled knowledge base, at the center of teacher education. In a cross-professional analysis of higher education instruction in professional programs (e.g., clergy, clinical psychology, and education), Grossman et al. (2009) identified three interrelated instructional strategies that collectively reflect PBTE: representations, decompositions, and approximations of practice (see Figure 1).

The PBTE process, while effective for preparing TCs for the demanding work they will face (Gardiner, 2019; Kavanagh & Danielson, 2020; Kazemi et al., 2016; Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2013), does not directly account for the socialization forces that reproduce exclusionary practices and inequitable outcomes. Recent PBTE research hypothesizes that coupling a social justice focus on decompositions and approximations can mitigate this concern and expand PBTE’s potential to positively impact readiness to advocate for equitable practices (Kavanagh & Danielson, 2020).

The proposed intervention outlined here couples PBTE pedagogies of representation, decompositions, and approximations, *as well as* the naming, analyzing, and addressing of niceness and forms of bias. We advocate for advancing Kavanagh and Danielson’s (2020) recommendations to integrate social justice into PBTE as follows:

1. *Representing* common problematic scenarios steeped in ableism, racism, whiteness, and other oppressive ideologies that special education teachers face,
2. Identifying where socialized niceness and other forms of bias may be present in actions, inactions, and dialogue as an essential part of *decomposing*, and
3. Applying *approximations* to practice more equitable and inclusive responses. This can include *rehearsals* (i.e., role play) where TCs can pause to problem solve, receive feedback, pause and ask another participant to step in and model, and rewind and redo, integrating feedback (Gardiner, 2019).

This process provides the space to name inequities and biases, where they are upheld through socialized niceness, and to “rescript” to provide a counter-framing that can help them respond in more ethical and principled ways when facing similar situations in the future.

FIGURE 1: Summary of Three Elements of Practice-Based Teacher Education (PBTE)

PBTE is most often used to make visible and allow guided practice with specific instructional practices and teaching responsibilities (e.g., collaborating with teachers and families, disrupting inequitable classroom practice, facilitating difficult conversations, writing IEPs). Because independent, principled enactment of these practices is the ultimate aim, representations, decompositions, and approximations are meant to be used fluently, in flexible combinations, with pauses, “re-do’s,” and tagging in and out as needed.

<u>REPRESENTATIONS</u>	<u>DECOMPOSITIONS</u>	<u>APPROXIMATIONS</u>
<p>Make the work visible through modeling (live demonstrations), case studies, narrative accounts of dilemmas, lesson plans, and more. Representations can provide a robust image of practice, but taken alone are insufficient as much of what makes a practice effective can be invisible or go unnoticed.</p>	<p>Contribute to meaning-making by breaking down that representation of practice into its constituent parts, and naming each in order for novices to fully “see”, be able to discuss, and later enact that practice with greater effectiveness. Novices are able to not only discuss and analyze the practice, but they are also better able to identify and understand how/why the pieces fit together.</p>	<p>Contribute to meaning-making by breaking down that representation of practice into its constituent parts and naming each in order for novices to fully “see,” discuss, and later enact that practice with greater effectiveness. Novices are then better able to identify and understand how/why the pieces fit together.</p>

TABLE 2: Key Vocabulary to Develop TC Readiness for Explorations of Socialized Niceness

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Niceness • Whiteness • Culture • Socialization • Ideology • Privilege • Intersectionality • Heteronormativity • Patriarchy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ableism • Classism • Racism • Microaggression • Prejudice • Discrimination • Marginalized • Implicit Bias
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APPLICATION**Getting Started: Build a Shared Language to Center Equity and Inform Analysis**

Paramount to the successful employment of PBTE in building TCs’ toolkits for disrupting socialized niceness is establishing a shared understanding of some of the key related vocabulary and concepts. While there are many potentially relevant terms, we recommend selecting those that are most relevant to TCs’ contexts (e.g., current course-

work, field experiences, future teaching placements based on license, etc.). Table 2 reflects several important terms.

This list is not exhaustive and does not adequately capture the nuances and very real impacts on many of our students’ lived experiences. Instead, they provide a shared starting point upon which we can build a more nuanced and intersectional perspective. Table 3 is a list of resources to begin exploring these concepts, and we recommend the following resource for term clarification: Diversity and So-

cial Justice Glossary | Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

These resources can provide a conceptual foundation for TCs’ principled decompositions and approximates, as well as their application to their broader life.

Initial Equity-Centered Representation & Decompositions

Next, TCs explore these concepts by *partially employing PBTE*, beginning with *positive-model representations and decompositions*. In contrast to how representations and decomposing will be used within the full PBTE protocol (below), here they serve as a positive model of a strong example of practice, showing students examples where socialized niceness *could* present a barrier to equitable and inclusive practice, the biases that undergird the behaviors, and a way to effectively respond in the best interest of the students.

When engaging in equity-centered decompositions based on positive-models, it will be vital for the teacher educator (TE) to help TCs:

TABLE 3: Recommended Initial Resources for TC Exploration of Key Terms and Concepts

- [Is Everyone Really Equal](#) by Özlem Sensoy & Robin DiAngelo
- [Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man](#) by Emmanuel Acho
- [So You Want to Talk About Race](#) by Ijeoma Oluo
- [The Price of Nice: How Good Intentions Maintain Educational Inequity](#) edited by Angelina Castagno
- [Disability Visibility Project](#)
- [White Supremacy Culture](#) by Tema Okum
- Social Media: @imanibarbarin.bsky.social, @portianoir.com
- [Harvard Implicit Association Test](#)
- [DisCrit: Disability studies & Critical Race Theory in Education](#) edited by David Connor

1. Identify and name where biases show up in the representation. This is often where discomfort in continuing the conversation emerges and where socialized niceness - prioritizing situational comfort and amenability of the adults present are prioritized over the rights of students - is maintained.
2. Recognize where and how the special education teacher (i.e., positive model) navigates and ultimately works through niceness in the interest of better serving students.

See, for example, the sample positive-model scenario below.

Scenario 1 – Positive-Model Representation and Decomposition.

Representation. You are a first-year special education teacher who is trying to co-plan and co-teach with a fourth-grade teacher with four students with IEPs in their classroom. Collectively, their IEPs call for services to be provided in the general education classroom (inclusion), but that is not happening. The general education teacher, Ms. Brown, regularly avoids co-planning with you, saying they are too busy. When you come to their classroom, Ms. Brown asks you to pull “your” stu-

dents (e.g., those receiving specialized services from a special education teacher - you - as outlined in their IEPs) aside to work separately. This has prevented you from effectively providing students with the services they deserve and are guaranteed via their IEPs.

You: Hi, Ms. Brown. I wanted to check in about our co-planning time for next week. It’s really important for us to align on strategies and ensure the students with IEPs are fully included.

Ms. Brown (sighing): I know, but I’ve been so swamped. I’ve got grading, meetings, and prepping for the school assembly. I don’t know how to fit in another meeting.

You: I understand you’re busy—it’s a lot to manage. But without planning together, it’s hard to create an inclusive environment. Lately, I’ve noticed I’m mostly working with the IEP students in isolation. That’s not the full inclusion model we’re aiming for.

Ms. Brown: Well, honestly, it’s just easier. They need so much support, and I can’t always slow the whole class down.

You: I hear your concern, and that’s exactly why co-planning is essential. Together, we can design

lessons that meet everyone’s needs, using strategies like small group rotations or scaffolded materials. It doesn’t have to be all on you or me. Ms. Brown: I get that, but my schedule is packed. Can’t you just handle their needs separately?

You: The goal of inclusion is to integrate, not separate. I want to support you and the class as a whole. Could we try a 15-minute planning session once a week? I can even come with a draft plan to make it easier.

Ms. Brown (pausing): Okay... maybe we can try that next week.

You: Great! I’ll send a couple of time options. I think this will make a big difference for our students.

Decomposition. Annotate & Reflect:

- Annotate:
- Identify where niceness is either upheld or resisted through words, body language, etc.
 - Identify other forms of bias that are present (e.g., ableism, racism, patriarchy...).

Question for reflection:

- Calling in (not calling out) Moves: What moves did the special education teacher make to address niceness and bias?
- Consequences: What are the po-

tential consequences for students with IEPs and/or teachers when socialized niceness and other forms of bias are maintained?

Empowering TC's to Disrupt Niceness and Bias Through PBTE

Once shared language is established and TCs have a solid understanding of *what effective practices* for recognizing and disrupting socialized niceness entail, the next step is to employ the *full* PBTE cycle - representation, decomposition, and approximation - as a way to build TCs' ability to identify and intervene on their own.

Here, *representations* reflect real-world scenarios where socialized niceness could create barriers to inclusion and equitable practice that TC's are likely to experience in their careers. These can include videos; case studies; educator, student, and/or family narratives; and scenario-based role plays (see Scenario 2 below) that are used to help students *unpack* and practice. The example scenario below reflects ableism and niceness.

Decompositions here focus on analyzing where niceness and other forms of bias are demonstrated. In the scenario below, to engage TCs in decompositions, we recommend annotating, highlighting, or other forms of coding. For example, identifying moments where niceness is present via maintaining comfort; avoiding imposition, ruffling feathers, or expressing expertise; protecting feelings; or prioritizing being seen as a team player. Or TCs may identify moments of ableism, annotating deficit ideologies, resistance to inclusion, a "yours/mine" mentality, or student blaming. Decompositions will be more meaningful if we invest heavily in building a shared understanding of the constructs we are exploring, as TCs cannot do a deep analysis if they have a shallow understanding of niceness, ableism, etc.

Approximations are practice opportunities in reduced-complexity settings with principled feedback. Feedback is essential so that TCs do not inadvertently further reinforce the socializations TEs are seeking to disrupt. During rehearsals, TCs, TEs, or peers can:

- Pause or call "timeout" to problem-solve or to request feedback.
- "Tag out," pausing to allow a peer or the TE to step in for additional modeling.
- "Rewind" and "redo" to work towards a more skilled and principled enactment.

To this end, norms should be established to focus the approximation on the work of inclusive and equitable teaching (calling in and not calling out) and to provide feedback that is concrete and focused on redressing niceness and other forms of bias.

The scenario below reflects a revised version of the first scenario. In this example, in lieu of a positive model, potential impacts of socialized niceness are included for analysis.

Scenario 2 – Representation, Decomposition, and Approximation.

Representation. You are a first-year special education teacher who is trying to co-plan and co-teach with a fourth-grade teacher who has four students with IEPs in their classroom. Collectively, their IEPs call for services to be provided in the general education classroom (inclusion), but that is not happening. The general education teacher, Ms. Brown, regularly avoids co-planning with you, saying they are too busy. When you come to their classroom, Ms. Brown asks you to pull "your" students (e.g., those receiving specialized services from a special education teacher - you - as outlined in their IEPs) aside to work separately. This has prevented you from effectively providing students with the services they deserve and are guaranteed via their IEPs.

You call for a meeting with Ms.

Brown to address this directly. Here is how it proceeds:

You: Hi, Ms. Brown. I just wanted to check in about co-planning for next week. Do you think we could find some time to sit down together?

Ms. Brown (rushed): Oh, I'd love to, but things are just so hectic right now. Between grading and prepping for the assembly, I can't squeeze in another meeting.

You (smiling nervously): Oh, I totally get it. Things are really busy this time of year.

Ms. Brown: Yeah, it's nonstop. Plus, with those IEP students, it's just easier if you pull them aside. They seem to get more out of it that way, don't you think?

You (hesitant): Um, yeah, I guess they do benefit from the extra support...

Ms. Brown: Exactly. And you're great with them, so it's really working well as it is.

You (nodding): Thanks. I just—well, I was thinking it might help if we worked together a bit more on lesson planning so we could integrate their supports into the class activities.

Ms. Brown: Maybe, but I just don't know when I'd have time for that.

You (smiling weakly): Yeah, I understand. Maybe we can figure something out later.

Ms. Brown: Sure, let's touch base when things settle down.

You (quietly): Okay, sounds good.

Narration: Despite your reservations, you decide not to press further, worried about coming across as pushy or disrupting the rapport with Ms. Brown.

Decomposition. Annotation and guided reflection support integrated learning.

Annotate:

- Identify where niceness is either upheld or resisted through words,

body language, etc.

- Identify other forms of bias that are present (e.g., ableism, racism, patriarchy...). Identify if they are resisted/addressed.

Question for reflection:

- Calling in (not calling out)
Moves: What moves *could* the special education teacher make to address niceness and bias?
- Consequences: What are the potential consequences for students with IEPs and/or teachers when socialized niceness and other forms of bias are maintained?

Approximations With Feedback.

To bridge *ideas* with *concrete and principled action*, TCs draw upon the annotated script and brainstorm ideas to practice *disrupting* socialized niceness and other forms of bias by:

1. Rewriting the script in ways that promote inclusion and resist niceness, building off of their annotations to develop alternative responses.
2. Rehearsing (role playing) the scene, applying their ideas.
3. Providing feedback during or after the rehearsal to support principled action.

Below are *some* of the moves that TCs can employ to build their ability to disrupt niceness, ableism, and other barriers to effectively including all learners. These moves should be used with the intent to call-in, to point out the biases in a way that demonstrates genuine care and concern for the teacher and the students, without judgment or humiliation:

- Center the students' experiences and impact. For example, in the scenarios above, co-teaching is, among other things, meant to reduce the adult-to-student ratio and maximize the impacts of diverse expertise, which can make a positive impact on students.

- Center students' humanity and dignity. They *deserve* respect, access, and support.
- Interject and reframe immediately if ableist, racist, or other inequitable language or ideas emerge. Use clarifying and probative prompts as appropriate:
 - "Can we pause for a moment? I want to be sure I understand what you mean when you say ___."
 - "Is there another way we could look at ___?"
 - "When I hear you say ___, I understand that to mean ___. Is that what you meant?"
- Empower TCs to recognize and name their expertise in those shared spaces/interactions. Special educators, too, are experts in their craft and have strategies, ideas, and tools to offer that will benefit *all* learners and the teacher whose workload you would be sharing.
- Outline the specific reasons why the practice or behavior in question is problematic (legal, moral, logistical) and advocate for legal and moral responsibilities. For example, in the scenario above: "My students have legally protected services that I am required by law to provide. Further, they deserve to have consistent specialized instruction in their least restrictive environment. I cannot pull them out into small groups. But I can work with you to better understand how I can support them and you in our shared classroom space. When can you meet?"
 - Encourage TCs to research as needed to feel confident in their expertise. Two recommended resources to start: subscribing to weekly updates from the Office of Special Education Programs

(<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/newsletters/>) or websites like *Wrightslaw* (<https://www.wrightslaw.com/>).

■ As needed, encourage TCs to give themselves time to calm down, follow up, and research: "I need 24 hours to think on this. I will follow up with you tomorrow."

Post-Approximation Discussion. To support transferable learning, a post-approximation discussion should be held to leverage the insights and actions taken in the approximation to wider teaching practice. Suggested questions to start:

- What insights about niceness and ableism did this scenario reveal?
- What, if anything, made you feel uncomfortable? What strategies can you employ to work through your own discomfort?
- How will you apply these insights as a special education teacher?

In addition to those provided here, we encourage the creation of additional scenarios that explore more nuanced and intersectional scenarios. Some additional scenarios that may be valuable to explore with TCs via the PBTE model could include the examples in Table 4.

Generative AI to Create Scenarios: Possibilities and Perils

One critique of PBTE is that it can be labor-intensive to locate or create representations. We discuss the possibilities and perils of Generative AI (GenAI) for representation creation.

GenAI possibilities:

- Reduces the workload of representation creation, thereby increasing the likelihood this process will occur and be sustained over time.

TABLE 4: Suggested Ideas for Additional Representation-Development

Additional Common Manifestations of Niceness Experienced by Special Educators	
<i>Smiling</i> silently through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting without a general educator because “there’s no coverage.”	<i>Wanting to avoid imposing on others, causing conflict, or ruffling feathers to preserve comfort, relationship; smoothing over tensions, making feedback more palatable.</i>
<i>Remaining quiet</i> when students with disabilities do not “earn” field trips because their behaviors did not meet the same expectations as their peers OR when they are “forgotten” for field trips because they spend limited time in general education classrooms.	
<i>Not addressing</i> ableist, disrespectful, or illegal words, actions, or policies (e.g. not “slowing” down changes of placement so that data can be collected; being asked to pull students out of the general education classroom in violation of LRE; etc.).	
<i>Keeping quiet</i> or not adding ideas while co-planning.	<i>Denying one’s expertise to not “show off” or appear arrogant.</i>
<i>Reframing your ideas</i> , particularly around inclusion, so they are more palatable to others, often without addressing root ableism/bias.	
Taking on duties (breakfast, lunch, dismissal, recess) above and beyond your general education peers even though they detract from your ability to provide services, <i>because the principal asked you.</i>	<i>Prioritizing being a rule follower and people-pleasing; preserve the image of being a team player.</i>
<i>Providing substitute coverage</i> for absent general education teachers.	
<i>Wearing/carrying a walky-talky</i> to provide “behavior support” to students across the school <i>because the administrators told you to.</i>	

FIGURE 2: The Relationship Between PBTE and TCS’ Ability to Challenge Inequitable Practices

Employing PBTE with TCs to explore commonly-occurring, school-based inequities through the lens of socialized niceness (and other biases), can better prepare them to directly respond when presented with similar situations in their schools and classrooms.		
Establishing shared language builds TCs’ ability recognize examples of socialized niceness and other implicit biases that can create or perpetuate inequitable practice.	Representations and decompositions of a positive-model build TCs’ capacity to identify socialized niceness and strategies for working through it, strengthening their knowledge of how to effectively challenge inequitable practices even when doing so may cause discomfort.	Real-world representations, decompositions, and approximations with feedback and opportunities to practice, build TCs’ competence and confidence in actively challenging inequities even when doing so may cause discomfort, in the interest of better serving students.

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- Provides a broader range of representations than an individual TE could come up with on their own, particularly when prompts are precise, specifying the tone and/or perspective to be taken (e.g., Fitzpatrick et al., 2023).

GenAI perils:

- Reflects dominant cultural biases, and GenAI representations can perpetuate the biases we seek to disrupt (Enriquez et al., 2024; Shaw et al., 2024).
- Representations can lack real-world nuance or be generic.
- Contributes to carbon footprint, and energy consumption far greater than a basic web search.
- Depletes freshwater resources.

While a critical read of what is generated can address biased and generic representations, the environmental impact will happen (Shaw et al., 2024). An informed, purposeful use (e.g., careful prompting, using for complex products that are not otherwise easily obtained), saving the representations for future use, and sharing among colleagues are ways to reduce environmental impact.

CONCLUSION

The history of special education is rife with inequities, oppression, barriers to access, and injustice. The vestiges remain in the systems, practices, and policies that drive education and can contribute to higher levels of special educator attrition. It is vital that those working within special education systems fight to correct them, both systemically and in their day-to-day practices and interactions. Among the ways we as special educators can do this is by recognizing and intervening effectively when faced with socialized niceness and other socializations and biases that work alongside it, even when doing so

causes discomfort for us or our colleagues.

Like other skills, the ability to disrupt niceness and bias must be learned and practiced. PBTE, coupled with a social justice lens, provides a framework for EPPs to engage TCs in doing just this. Specifically, EPPs can utilize the following steps:

1. Establish TCs' robust and nuanced understanding of socialized niceness and other biases through shared readings, videos, and social media deep dives that are eventually applied via the PBTE model, which includes:
2. Provide TCs with *representations* of common real-world scenarios steeped in oppressive ideologies that special education teachers face.
3. Lead TCs through *decompositions* where they identify where socialized niceness and other forms of bias may be present in actions, inactions, and dialogue.
4. Engage TCs in *approximations* to practice more equitable and inclusive responses. As they discuss, re-script, and/or rehearse (role play), TCs can pause to problem solve, receive feedback, "tag out" to see another participant model, and "rewind and redo."

When taken together and including considerations of socialized niceness and other biases, the elements of PBTE can facilitate TCs' understanding of, ability to identify, and skills for navigating towards a more inclusive and equitable practice (Figure 2).

PBTE, applied through a lens of socialized niceness, can build TCs' ability to confront inequity head-on, even if it causes discomfort, in order to better serve all students. The temporary discomfort that comes from the

impacts of socialized niceness when we battle against inequities, injustices, biases, and exclusionary practices pales in comparison to the very real consequences to our students when we do not. Special education teachers must be ready.

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