

Programmatic Intentions on P-12 Preservice Teachers' Perspectives of Diversity and Disability

Mary D. Burbank
University of Utah

Melissa M. Goldsmith
University of Utah

Sharlene Kiuvara
University of Utah

Abstract: Teacher education programs must examine their curriculum and field-based experiences to ensure attention to teaching children who are diverse in language, culture, and abilities. Researchers used surveys to understand ways course and field work may have impacted Preservice Teachers' (PTs') perceptions of diversity. PTs reported that the program attended to preparation to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students and had fewer experiences in support of teaching students with physical, learning, or behavioral differences. Findings indicate ways for teacher education programs with social justice commitments to increase equitable and inclusive practices that align with the goal of teaching all students.

Keywords: teacher education, social justice, disability studies, preservice teacher attitudes

The focus of contemporary teacher education in the United States includes coursework and field-based experiences that prepare elementary, secondary, and special educators to teach and assess learners with varied and diverse life experiences (Banks, 2008; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), 2022; Darling-Hammond, 2002; National Council for Teacher Quality, 2020). Many preparation programs contain a multicultural education component as part of a social justice curriculum that examines equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (Burbank et al., 2016; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016; Commins & Miramontes, 2006; Gay, 2018; Goldenberg, 2008; González et al., 2009; Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Preparation programs may examine culturally sustaining pedagogy and curricula for P-12 language learners from varied cultural backgrounds. In addition to offering preservice teachers (PTs) a menu of courses and field-based experience, preparation programs must examine PTs' views on how program experiences have impacted their understanding of the range of students' needs, assets, and contributions. These emphases are particularly necessary for working with children with varying abilities.

The purpose of this study was to understand program impact on two PT cohorts to determine whether and how teacher preparation affects perceptions of diversity. The researchers considered the perspectives of PTs early in their preparation program and PTs late into their programs at Mountain West University (MWU, a pseudonym). This study is a descriptive evaluation of the program including coursework in both general and special education as areas central to the program's value of inclusion and parity across licensure areas.

Preservice Teacher Preparation Programs

Historically, teacher preparation coursework had been confined to standalone courses (e.g., Mahar et al., 2021; Shippen et al., 2005) often devoid of analyses of whether and how courses and field experiences reflect institutional commitments to social justice and teaching all children (Bell, 1997; Blanton et al., Burbank, et al., 2012; 2018; Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Beyond a philosophical commitment to full inclusion, attention to social justice as a cornerstone of EDI must include analyses that unearth systemic dynamics of power and oppression (Hackman, 2005). Preparation programs that effectively commit to EDI consciously examine systemic inequities in courses, pedagogy, and engagement where teachers are culpable to sustaining injustices (Westheimer, 2015). These investigations serve as opportunities to reflect and evaluate extant practices that may run counter to purported goals and values (Burbank, et al., 2016; Jefferson et al., 2018).

A first step in reflecting on program quality involves identifying how preparation programs challenge deficit views of all people, including people with disabilities. Adopting this stance prompts preparation programs to promote strengths in ways that recognize the role of contexts and the assets of people with disabilities (Nevin et al., 2008). This shift moves beyond compliance with external measures of “quality” based upon formulaic demonstrations of skills (Banks, 1995, 2008; Gay, 2018; Nevin et al., 2008; Watson, 2008).

The PT program at MWU builds on previous research that addresses diversity of language to include examinations of programmatic emphases where a social justice commitment includes explorations of institutional practices that impact children who are diverse in language, culture, and ability (Causey et al., 2000; Garmon, 2004; Lee, 2011). Here, researchers explore the degree to which curricula intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate a deficit model of ableism (Florian, 2008; Gutiérrez, 2008; McDermott & Varenne, 1995).

A Case Study: MWU

Within the College of Education at MWU, teacher preparation program emphases include bachelor’s or master’s level degrees with licensure in elementary, secondary, or special education with specializations in severe, mild/moderate, deaf and hard of hearing, early childhood, vision impairments, and adapted physical education. MWU’s programs include many standard elements of teacher preparation that examine intersections between “disability” such as the physical and social structures or environments designed for typically developing bodies or minds (Gutiérrez, 2008; Klinger & Edwards, 2006) and policies that shape practices and perceptions of disability (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016; Minow, 1990).

Curricula are informed by diversity and critical language scholars (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith and Villegas, 2016; Commins & Miramontes, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and research on culturally responsive teaching and social justice (Au, 2007; Gay, 2018; Irvine, 2003, 2012; Sleeter, 2001). Coursework addresses learner ability, language, culture, ethnicity, and sexual orientation with dedicated attention to working with families and communities as part of a Teacher Education Core (TEC).

All PTs complete 18 hours of the TEC before specialization coursework including an introduction to teaching, human exceptionality, ethnicities, language, families, educational psychology, educational technology, and multicultural education. All education majors complete three special education courses and coursework on language learners (i.e., five courses for elementary, four for secondary, and two for special education).

The TEC recognizes the integration of content across curricular emphases that respond to the learning needs of P-12 students as multidimensional learners with unique and complex identities

(Banks, 1995, 2008; Gay, 2018; Watson, 2008). TEC courses align with the program's social justice mission, where educators acknowledge how all children approach learning including in support of culture, language, and ability (Blanton et al., 2018). These efforts include analyses of classrooms and schools where systemic dynamics of power and oppression reside (Hackman, 2005).

Abilities as Assets

Curricula at MWU embraces diversity through social justice and a commitment to varied ability when working with diverse learners and is informed by Disabilities Studies. MWU reframes personal identity and historical, cultural, and political views of people with disabilities (Ferri, 2011; Minow, 1990). It recognizes that historical perceptions of disability stem from a medical model of pathology or problems, where remediation “solves” or “fixes” what has been viewed as atypical or lacking (Florian, 2008; McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Disabilities Studies underscores disability justice as a means of validating the unique assets and contributions of individuals with disabilities, making visible the contextual factors that negatively influence individuals (Linton, 1998; Shapiro, 1993; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). Previous research examines general attitudes of PTs and perceptions of students with disabilities, in addition to feelings of general preparedness to teach students (Shade & Stewart, 2001; Shippen et al., 2005). However, previous research has yet to identify attention to course and field work as factors impacting PT's receptivity to acquiring an EDI lens through which they view diversity and disability.

The Present Study

With the goal of preparing teachers to work with all children in P-12 classrooms, the researchers sought to understand the programmatic impact, if any, on PTs' perspectives of working with students with diverse abilities, languages, and cultures.

This study examined the perspectives of PTs in the first year and PTs in the final year of their program. This study aimed to answer the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: How knowledgeable and prepared do PTs feel overall in working with the particular P-12 student groups under study?
- RQ2: What attitudes do PTs express about working with P-12 students who are culturally and linguistically diverse?
- RQ3: What attitudes do PTs express about working with P-12 students with *disabilities*?
- RQ4: What attitudes do PTs express about working with P-12 students with *mild moderate disabilities*?
- RQ5: What attitudes do PTs express about working with P-12 students with *severe disabilities*?

Method

Participants

PTs early in their teacher preparation program (PT1) and PTs late in their teacher preparation program (PT2) were eligible for the surveys. Researchers administered the PT1 survey to 110 PTs following completion of *Introduction to Teaching*, for a response rate of 70%. There were 77 PT1s who responded: 36 (47%) elementary education majors, 20 (26%) secondary education majors, seven (9%) special education majors (five from severe disabilities, one from mild moderate disabilities, one early childhood education), and 14 (18%) who did not report their teaching area. Researchers administered

the PT2 survey to 61 PT2s enrolled in student teaching for a response rate of 43%. Twenty-six PT2s completed the survey: two (8%) elementary education majors, 14 (54%) secondary education majors, 0% special education majors, and 10 (38%) who did not report their teaching area.

Survey Instruments and Procedure

The researchers developed two online surveys using Qualtrics. Both surveys asked PTs to consider their overall preparation of P-12 students, attitudes toward working with both P-12 students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, and students with differences in ability (i.e., severe and mild to moderate disabilities). Data were collected at two intervals during an academic year (i.e., spring and fall semesters, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic). Course instructors shared the survey link with one reminder email.

PT1

The PT1 survey consisted of 11 closed-ended questions choosing from particular categories and 11 open-text questions that allowed respondents to elaborate on responses or offer free-form reflective responses. The survey addressed attitudes on general knowledge, attitudes for work with diverse learners, and knowledge of instruction for students with language and ability differences. Specific questions differentiated between mild moderate and severe disabilities. Additional questions addressed instruction for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, students with mild moderate disabilities, and students with severe disabilities. Three demographic questions addressed majors, secondary level content areas, and special education specializations. Course instructors distributed surveys within an Introduction to Teaching course.

PT2

The survey for PT2 consisted of 11 closed-ended questions and 17 open-text questions. The survey included questions pertinent to student teachers regarding past experiences and future plans to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students, definition of the term “disability,” challenges working with students with disabilities, confidence in differentiating instruction for students with mild moderate disabilities, advantages and challenges of working with students with mild moderate disabilities, confidence in differentiating instruction for students with severe disabilities, advantages and challenges of providing instruction to students with severe disabilities. The survey included questions that were also asked of PT1s to allow for comparison between groups. Demographic information included teaching major, secondary content areas, and special education specializations. Data collection procedures for PT2s were identical to those for PT1s, except that data collection took place within student teaching courses.

Results

Data Analysis

Researchers analyzed the closed-ended responses using descriptive statistics (Neuman, 2003). Researchers coded open-ended responses for themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) by using in vivo coding to determine codes and then pattern coding to create themes (Miles et al., 2020). Specifically, the researchers reviewed survey questions to contextualize and assign categories to responses. The categories generated from each question allowed for the identification of themes. To maximize inter-

rater reliability, two authors independently evaluated 100% of survey responses and resolved all differences.

The remainder of this section presents the analysis for the RQs. See Table 1 and Table 2 for a summary table of the survey findings.

Table 1. PT1 cohort responses for working with P-12 student groups.

	Quantitative results	Qualitative results
	% (Question n)	Summary
Culturally And Linguistically Diverse P-12 Students		
Knowledgeable Advantages	77% (n=77)	Opportunity to learn about different cultures; helping all students succeed
Plan to work with	63% (n=64)	Desire to help; shares culture; desire to learn from different cultures
Future opportunities		Language barriers; difficulties in learning grade level material
P-12 Students with Mild Moderate Disabilities		
Knowledgeable Advantages	57% (n=77)	Opportunities for inclusion; learn flexibility, adaptability, patience
Confidence differentiating	59% (n=63)	
Can learn grade-level material	83% (n=63)	
Future opportunities		Lack of knowledge for accommodations and diversifying instruction
P-12 Students with Severe Disabilities		
Knowledgeable Advantages	30% (n=77)	Instructors learn how to think in new ways; personal gains; relationship-building through individualized instruction and group setting
Confidence differentiating	31% (n=62)	
Can learn grade-level material	48% (n=62)	
Future opportunities		Instructor frustration

Table 2. PT2 cohort responses for working with P-12 student groups.

	Quantitative results	Qualitative results
	% (Question n)	Summary
Culturally And Linguistically Diverse P-12 Students		
Prepared	97% (n=26)	
Plan to work with	73% (n=22)	Share similar backgrounds as students; teaching will require these experiences; benefits of diversity
Program coursework experience		Connections between course/field work and teaching; lack of work with parents, families, communities
P-12 Students with Mild Moderate Disabilities		
Prepared	81% (n=26)	
Confidence differentiating Advantages	63% (n=16)	Opportunities for inclusion; learn flexibility, adaptability, patience
Future opportunities		Stress, patience, time; balancing whole class needs
Program coursework experience (3 or more times per week)	60% (n=15)	SPED course work; field experiences; lacking in strategies
Determining P-12 learning		Through assessment
P-12 Students with Severe Disabilities		
Prepared	39% (n=26)	
Confidence differentiating Advantages	13% (n=16)	Unable to answer; helping
Future opportunities		Unable to answer; patience, learning new teaching strategies
Program coursework experience (3 or more times per week)	13% (n=16)	
Determining P-12 learning		Through Assessment

RQ1: Overall Level of Preparation for Working with P-12 Student Groups

Questions pertaining to RQ1 asked PT1s and PT2s to rate their level of knowledge and preparation to work with the P-12 student groups identified in the survey. PT1s and PT2s rated their knowledge and preparation to work with the student groups. PT1s reported they were most knowledgeable teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students (77%), less knowledgeable teaching children with

mild moderate disabilities (57%), and least knowledgeable of teaching students with severe disabilities (30%).

PT2s were asked about their level of preparation to teach multiple P-12 student groups. PT2s said they were best prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students (97%), less prepared to teach students with mild moderate disabilities (81%), and least prepared to teach students with severe disabilities (39%).

RQ2: Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse P-12 Students

PT1s and PT2s were asked to consider working with P-12 students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. PT1s were asked to share the advantages of working with culturally and linguistically diverse students, plans to work with this group and the expected challenges when teaching. PT2s were asked about their coursework and plans for future teaching of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

PT1 Responses

Advantages. PT1s cited personal, professional, and societal advantages of teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. A benefit included the opportunity to learn about different cultures and helping students succeed. One secondary PT1 said, “Not only are you helping these students being able to learn, but you also can learn about different cultures when doing so as well as languages.” An elementary PT1 reported, “... providing instruction to students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, it is including what makes them diverse into the curriculum and enforcing that their diversity is important. Other students who do not share the same culture background as them would be at an advantage as they will be able to learn about others as well.”

Working as a Teacher. Sixty-three percent of PT1s said they plan to work with diverse students. Overall, PT1s were interested in working with diverse students due to community need. However, motivations varied, depending on PTs’ experiences. One special education PT1 said, “I grew up speaking more than one language and having a separate culture at home from what I experienced at school, so I feel that I can understand culturally and linguistically diverse students more than the average teacher.” Another special education PT1 expressed a different motivation also based on their background: “I think that it will make me step out of the ‘box’ that I am in and will make me really understand the differences between cultures.”

Future Opportunities. PT1s noted language and culture as challenges they might face as instructors. PT1s indicated that language differences affect students’ understanding of subject content and the learning process. One elementary PT1 said, “Language barriers make it difficult for teachers to provide a full understanding of a concept they are teaching.” Another elementary PT1 noted, “Another challenge is trying to make the lessons and examples applicable to all of the students being aware that they all have had different experiences and are from different backgrounds.” PT1s also noted that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds might face challenges learning grade-level material, grasping content vocabulary in a specific subject, learning reading comprehension and writing, and obtaining skills that span multiple disciplines.

PT2 Responses

Coursework. PT2s connected to coursework and field experience in multicultural and urban education, community partnerships, and assessment. One secondary PT2 said, “My student teaching

and field experiences were in highly diverse communities, they were the most meaningful training experiences. Also [I took] specific classes that helped me self-examine my biases and perspectives.”

When asked about areas in which they were under prepared to teach students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, PT2s cited a lack of experience working with parents, families, and communities. One PT2, who did not identify a major, said, “Resources for working with culturally and linguistically diverse parents and families were limited.”

Working as a Teacher. Seventy-three percent of PT2s said they plan to work with diverse students. Like PT1s, PT2s noted personal and professional reasons as well as societal and demographic trends for their plans. A secondary PT2 said, “I am interested in working with these students because our society benefits from the diversity of culture and language that these students bring. It is important that these elements are encouraged in students rather than avoided or discouraged.”

Other PT2s expressed an interest in working with this group based on their personal backgrounds. A secondary PT2 shared, “As someone who is culturally and linguistically diverse, I always felt a little odd when I noticed that year after year, my teachers were white. I couldn’t see myself in them. It’s important to me that students see a non-white individual in the classroom, so they can see themselves in society.”

RQ3: Working with P-12 Students with Disabilities

Researchers included several questions in the surveys that used the term disabilities to capture attitudes regarding disabilities more broadly. They provided context to question responses on preparation regarding specific disabilities.

PT1 Responses

Defining Disability. PT1s were asked to define the term disability. Most definitions included the terms “hard,” “difficulty,” “disadvantage,” “special attention,” and “extra help.” PT1s mentioned other definitions using the term “different,” such as “I would define it as a different way of learning,” or “a different ability.”

Future Opportunities. PT1s indicated that students with disabilities might encounter frustration when learning grade-level material, particularly when measured against their peers. One elementary PT1 commented, “Any grade-level material may already be difficult to understand or pay attention to, there also may be problems of not being able to work collaboratively to understand these concepts while the other students are keeping up.”

PT1s expressed future opportunities working with individuals with disabilities dependent upon individual students. One elementary PT1 said, “They could not be at a mental level to handle certain materials depending on their level of disability.” A secondary PT1 shared, “I think the challenge depends on each individual student.”

PT2 Responses

Defining Disability. When defining “disability,” PT2s often used the word “ability,” including phrases such as “limits a student’s ability,” or “hinders their abilities.” One PT2, who did not identify their major said, “I consider every person to have disabilities in some way or another to manifest something they are ‘not able’ to do. Some of visible; some are not. When I work with students with mild or severe limitations, it is no different than working with a typical peer/student with areas of limitations also.”

Future Opportunities. PT2s noted that students with disabilities might face challenges working with grade-level material, particularly in reading and writing and issues related to “focus,” “confidence,” and “communication” as other challenges students for students with disabilities.

Coursework. PT2s experienced working with students with disabilities as part of student teaching including students with autism, were hard of hearing, had ADHA, experienced reading and writing delays, had severe disabilities, and/or had learning disabilities. A secondary PT2 said of their experience, “I had experience with two students with special needs. These students had to be placed in front of the classroom in order to better see and hear the material. In addition, I would work with a special needs assistant to provide them with any specific information they needed.”

Other PT2s did not teach students with disabilities during student teaching or were not provided with information about their students. A secondary PT2 said, “I was never given specifics on the nature of their being in SPED other than accommodations they needed. I did not need to know the why of an accommodation, and being their [sic] only one quarter it didn’t seem necessary to know this sensitive information.”

RQ4: Teaching P-12 Students with Mild Moderate Disabilities

The survey asked PT1s to share attitudes toward working with students with mild moderate disabilities the advantages, and future opportunities of working with this student group. PT2s also were asked to share their attitudes, note advantages, and identify challenges. PT2s were also asked about their related coursework and to indicate how they determined learning when working with a student with mild moderate disabilities.

PT1 Responses

Attitudes. Fifty-nine percent of PT1s reported confidence in how differentiation for students with mild moderate disabilities. Eighty-three percent of PT1s said students with mild moderate disabilities can learn grade-level material.

Advantages. When asked to identify advantages of teaching students with mild moderate disabilities, PT1s cited the benefits of inclusive environments. One special education PT1 wrote, “The advantages to providing instruction to students with mild to moderate disabilities is the students will be able to learn better in general education classrooms. Students can receive an IEP and get accommodations not matter how big or small based on what they may need and that is something students may need educators will benefit from more than we know.” An elementary PT1 said, “Their abilities may be shown more if they are in a full inclusion classroom, they gain the confidence they need to accomplish learning.” A secondary PT1 offered, “Give them a somewhat normal and social education and not keep them isolated.”

Another advantage of instruction for students with mild moderate disabilities included benefits for instructors including being “more creative and flexible,” according to an elementary PT1. A secondary PT1 mentioned, “Being able to break down your teaching or adapt your teaching in different ways to help a student learn.”

Future Opportunities. PT1 responses implied a lack of knowledge for how to engage with students with mild moderate disabilities. One elementary PT1 said a challenge was, “Not enough training on how to deal with specific disabilities.” A special education PT1 shared, “Each student is different and it can be hard to make different accommodations for each of them when you have 20 students in a classroom who each require different things.”

Other responses regarding limited preparation to work with students with mild moderate disabilities included diversifying instruction or task completion. One elementary PT1 indicated,

“Teachers may have to reanalyze the way that they are teaching.” Another elementary PT1 said, “Differentiating material can be very difficult.”

PT2 Responses

Attitudes. Sixty-three percent of PT2s reported confidence in differentiation for students with mild moderate disabilities.

Advantages. PT2s cited benefits to instructors as an advantage when working with students with mild moderate disabilities. One secondary PT2 said, “This provided me with a lot of experience in creating, applying, and assessing many varied accommodations throughout the course of my student teaching.” Another secondary PT2, however, said that they were able to apply their teaching skills without any difference for this student population, noting, “It helps develop teaching skills that are universally applicable.”

Future Opportunities. PT2s noted practical considerations as challenges associated with providing instruction to students with mild moderate disabilities. PT2s cited “stress,” “patience,” “time” and large class sizes as challenges. Others cited the importance of balancing the needs of the whole class. One secondary PT2 said, “I honestly almost never had the time to help them one on one. I have 30 other kids in the class that have 30 different questions that need to be addressed, and I cannot give anyone special treatment.”

Coursework. Sixty percent (n=15) reported opportunities to teach students with mild moderate disabilities as part of special education courses and field experiences. PT2s noted limited preparation to teach P-12 students with mild moderate disabilities. However, they reported being underprepared in differentiation, strategies, relationship-building, and scaffolding. One secondary PT2 noted, “For general education teachers there was not a lot of practice with teaching actual SPED students. Far more emphasis was placed on ESL.” Another secondary PT2 said, “I feel like I was never really given concrete strategies to work with these students. I was pretty much told ‘Alter what you have so they can do it’.”

Determining Learning. PT2s were asked to consider how they will support students with mild moderate disabilities. PT2s indicated that they would employ assessment strategies to look for “progress” and “achievement.” PT2s mentioned measuring learning as evaluated through student IEPs and 504s.

RQ5: Teaching P-12 Students with Severe Disabilities

PT1s responded to questions regarding their attitudes of working with students with severe disabilities and the advantages and future opportunities for working with students with severe disabilities. PT2s responded to questions related to attitudes, advantages, future opportunities as well. Additional questions for PT2s probed coursework and ways to determine whether students with severe disabilities are learning.

PT1 Responses

Attitudes. Thirty-one percent of PT1s expressed confidence in their knowledge of differentiation for students with severe disabilities. Forty-eight percent said students with severe disabilities can learn grade-level material.

Advantages. PT1s cited advantages to the instructor when working with students with severe disabilities. One special education PT1 said, “I think it makes teachers think outside of the box, with how they teach the material, because they don’t learn the same way.” A secondary PT1 said, “I think

that there are a lot of intrinsic rewards. I think that you gain more internally from teaching students with severe disabilities. This is because it can help you grow and learn yourself, and become a better teacher.”

PT1s cited framed advantages of working with students with severe disabilities in terms of the positive impact on the students. One elementary PT1 mentioned the individualized instruction a severe student might receive when commenting, “They get personalized information for their learning. Things are done with them in mind.” A special education PT1 said, “Students with severe disabilities require a lot of care and the advantages to caring for them are they receive care in school rather than just at home, they are able to make friends at school, and they are able to learn at their own pace at the school.”

Future Opportunities. PT1s used the word “frustration” when describing challenges teachers might face when providing instruction to students with severe disabilities. One elementary PT1 noted, “Frustration at times, or a feeling of helplessness if a student isn’t able to understand yet.” A secondary PT1 said, “Frustrations can occur when teaching students with severe disabilities. However, it is crucial that the teacher learn to be patient and calm when teaching these students.” PT1s also mentioned terms such as “hard,” “failing,” and “struggle,” when identifying challenges to working with students with severe disabilities.

PT2 Responses

Attitudes. Of the 16 PT2s who answered this question, 13% expressed confidence in their knowledge of how to differentiate instruction for students with severe disabilities.

Advantages. The majority of PT2s were not able to cite advantages of providing instruction to students with severe disabilities due to limited work with this student group. PT2s centered responses referencing “help.” A secondary PT2 said, “You have an opportunity to help students who most need help.”

Future Opportunities. PT2s did not identify any challenges working with students with severe disabilities, as they lacked practical experience in this area. When survey responses were shared, PT2s suggested “patience” as a challenge or indicated challenges related to the employment of teaching strategies. For example, one secondary PT2 shared, “I believe that teachers may be challenged by the possibility that some strategies may not be successful. Teachers may expend a lot of time and energy in the ‘trial and error’ practices with strategies.”

Coursework. Thirteen percent of PT2s said that they worked with students with severe disabilities “3 or more times per week.” Special education coursework had prepared them. However, 88% of PT2s said they had no opportunities. When asked specifically about program preparation for teaching students with severe disabilities, PT2s generally indicated a lack of courses, readings, activities, or field experiences, using terms such as “none,” “little training,” or “no classes or instruction.” PT2s did not always note the lack of preparation as problematic if they were not seeking special education licensure nor planning to work with students with severe disabilities.

Determining Learning. PT2s said they would implement assessments to determine progress for a student in their classroom. As one secondary PT2 said, “If a student has improved in whichever aspect or goal they set then that is progress. Factors might include improving in specific skills, showing understanding, or improving in behavior.”

Discussion

Responses comparisons from PT1s, early in their program, and PT2s, later in their programs, offer indications of the impact of the MWU teacher preparation program on PTs’ attitudes. Study findings

fell across four areas: overall preparation; specific preparation for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students; preparation to teach students with mild moderate disabilities; and preparation to teach students with severe disabilities. Overall PT1s cited strong attitudes toward teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, knowledge of teaching students with mild moderate disabilities, and had limited knowledge regarding teaching students with severe disabilities. Similarly, PT2s felt expressed confidence in their work teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, had some quality experiences working with students with mild moderate disabilities, and had limited experiences working with children with severe disabilities.

Program Impact

The program appeared effective in aligning with its mission of supporting PTs in their work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. PTs complete multiple courses and field experiences. However, PTs varied in their knowledge and confidence to teach a range of students, particularly students with disabilities. These differences were most notable regarding work with children with extensive support needs. Opportunities to teach P-12 students with severe disabilities is typically not a feature of the preparation experiences for those majoring in elementary and secondary education. However, this finding raises opportunities to examine teacher preparation dedicated to inclusive education for all P-12 students. Further, the program must consider whether the inclusive practices touted within its program mission embody work with all students, and in in depth, versus students with whom PTs are most likely to teach as part of their programs of study. For example, survey responses reflected a typically compartmentalized and traditional view of learners based upon individualized courses and the perpetuation of siloed course curricula. Intersections in how PTs viewed learners reflected little overlap in PTs' understandings of all students' identities reflecting narrow understandings differences.

Across P-12 teaching experiences with students with severe and mild moderate disabilities, PT2s referenced general competencies for how to use assessment as a strategy to determine learning. However, PT2s grappled with the tensions between understanding the assets of all students and the actionable ways they would specifically respond, though references to learners' unique needs highlights the potential for all learners to be academically successful. PTs acknowledged the challenges they will face based upon each child's needs. Unlike language learners, the presumed needs of those with differing cognitive and physical abilities was more broad-based and less specific in terms of individuals (e.g., overall communication differences, and varying performance skills in reading and writing).

Implications and Next Steps

Understanding that learner diversity is multifaceted may offer a more proactive and just perspective where PTs examine structures, environments, and normative practices that differentiate the qualities and assets of each student. This change in stance requires a critical analysis of status quo practices in classrooms and schools to bolster PTs understanding of teaching that acknowledge different ways of being, learning, moving, thinking, and behaving (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Minow, 1990).

Although study data findings are informative, there are limitations. The number of participants and their programmatic representation does not provide a comprehensive profile of all PTs (i.e., a limited number with a special education emphasis, with a severe specialization). Additional analyses of program curricula, field experiences, and licensure emphases would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the PTs' varied programs.

Conclusion

The study indicates recommendations for preparation programs to ensure commitments to social justice by attending to how all children approach learning in ways that move beyond licensure course completion (Blanton et al., 2018). Preparation programs must examine whether coursework and field experiences affect PTs' perceptions toward teaching all P-12 students. Findings may be useful to teacher preparation programs to address diversity in ways that include structural components rather than a generic menu of licensure classes (Banks, 1995, 2008; Gay, 2018; Watson, 2008).

Inclusive teacher preparation for all students requires thoughtful analyses of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and practice-based experiences through a social justice framework. This work must be deliberate and sustained across programming through reflection and actions (e.g., action research, self-studies, in-depth observations, evaluations with dedicated attention to all learners). Program experiences must evaluate whether PTs are able to explore, critique, and respond to the factors that influence learner needs. Siloed approaches to preparation, even when espoused views or mission goals report interdisciplinary commitments, fail to consider the integral relationship between the range of variables that are unique to individuals.

Examinations of systemic barriers, explorations of beliefs and biases, and a recognition that without attention and action, classroom experiences continue to limit opportunities to teach and to learn from students with disabilities and from all peers. To that end, teacher educators must determine whether, and in what ways, preparation programs reinforce historical practices. These practices are evident when coursework and field work do not include critical examinations of the intersectionality and the layered dimensions of each learner as central to course curricula and field experiences (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016).

Additionally, systemic factors that impact student success (e.g., access to service, curriculum, and assessment) must be considered and supported by preparation program leaders through actions that foster “cross-pollination.” Waitoller and Thorius (2016) suggest disruptions in standalone responses to preparing teachers to address diversity (e.g., National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2017); and culturally sustaining pedagogies. Instead, preparation for work with all students must move beyond systemic conditions that underscore deficits. This shift provides future educators with the knowledge and tools to encourage disruptions in what teacher preparation programs have typically viewed as “challenges.” Through practicum experiences, coursework, and curricula that acknowledge and evaluate intersections, the researchers agree with Martínez-Álvarez and Chiang (2020) and propose PTs are poised to extend their early confidence and optimism for work with all children.

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