

Inclusion: How prepared are preservice teachers?

1. Proposal Narrative

A. Abstract

Inclusion, or the teaching of *all* students within the general education setting, is not a new concept. For the past several decades, national and local policies have accentuated the significance of including all students to the maximum extent possible in this environment (Turnbull, 2005). Self-efficacy, or the belief that one has the skills necessary to complete actions, is also not a new concept. Much research has been written on the importance of teacher beliefs and the impact these perceptions have on one's ability to carry out instructional strategies, as well as the effect the beliefs have on student outcomes (Sharma, Shaukat & Furlonger, 2015). The purpose of this research is to see how prepared preservice teachers feel to include all students, including students with disabilities, into their general education classroom. Do preservice teachers feel confident in their ability to create and sustain these classrooms? Are there differences in teacher self-efficacy for inclusion asked on a preservice teachers' certification area (e.g., general education vs. special education) or based on their previous interactions with people with disabilities or prior teaching experience? The answers to these questions will be explored and shared if funding for this work is provided.

B. Background/Statement of the Problem/Significance of the Project

Investigating preservice teachers (PSTs) perceptions is important because a teachers' confidence in his/her ability to complete a task affects their ability to perform those skills. Investigating perceptions related to one's confidence in delivering quality instruction to all

students with and without disabilities is also important as today's classrooms are nothing if they are not diverse. General education teachers must feel as though they are able to teach all students, with and without disabilities, within the classroom. They must know how to deliver "inclusive" practices and feel confident in their ability to perform these practices. It is critical that we seek ways to understand PSTs perceptions related to inclusion, to investigate why these perceptions exist, and to identify ways which teacher preparation programs can adapt to make sure all PSTs are graduating feeling confident in their ability to perform such actions.

The current study is based off work completed in America (e.g., Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995; Sze, 2009; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012; Winter, 2006) and abroad (Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013). In the U.S., most of the work has been completed with inservice teachers (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995), although some work exists about PSTs perceptions related to inclusion. Investigations of PSTs has resulted in findings that suggest PSTs have negative attitude towards inclusion and have uncertainty in their abilities to teach students with disabilities (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995). Concerns about a prevailing lack of preparation and confidence, along with feeling apprehensive to provide for students with disabilities in the general education classroom was expressed among a wide range of PSTs (Jobling & Moni, 2004). These researchers indicated these perceptions influenced how students with disabilities performed in their classrooms. Many PSTs have little or no experience working with students with special needs, and they do not believe they are ready for their future classrooms (Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). Work with inservice teachers suggest new teachers have a negative attitude towards inclusion. Researchers have found that reasons for this relate to class size and PSTs

feeling they do not have the adequate resources to meet the needs of all students (Da Fonte & Barton- Arwood, 2017; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995). As indicated by these references, research related to this area of study has spanned several decades. One of the more recent studies has shown that PSTs perceptions have not changed. Only one third of the teachers surveyed felt they had the time, preparation, resources, and skills needed for successful instruction (Sze, 2009). Another study was conducted to measure recently graduated teachers' perceptions about their preservice training. One of the areas in the study pertained to how prepared they felt to teach students with special education needs. Only 18% of the 693 recently graduated teachers surveyed considered their preparation to be "very good" or "excellent" (Forlin, 2011). Researchers have hypothesized that inservice and PSTs perceptions would improve if teacher preparation programs would include more experiences related to the delivery of special education services (Jobling & Moni, 2004; Sze, 2009). The Teacher Self-Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP; Sharma; Loreman, & Forlin, 2012) is a validated measure that has been used in multiple international studies, but to date has not been used in the United States. No examination has used a validated survey to measure teacher self-efficacy towards inclusion.

It is critical to understand attitudes that PSTs have about incorporating and enacting an inclusive environment. Teachers who exemplify a positive attitude towards inclusion adjust the curriculum accordingly to the student's individual needs. To guarantee PSTs are prepared to teach all students, their attitudes should be assessed throughout their program, not just one or two courses (Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). Having a positive attitude has been identified as being the most beneficial characteristic for effective inclusive teachers, an even greater impact than knowledge and skills. A teacher's attitude will have an immense effect on a student's academic

success, so teachers must be aware of how they perceive students (Forlin, 2011; Shapiro, 1999). Confidence teachers have in their preparedness is the leading predictor of their teaching efficacy. PSTs with low self-efficacy do not tend to implement new practices for students with disabilities. Students' development can be detrimental if teachers are not putting in effort to provide tasks. The awareness that teachers have about their own abilities has been discovered to affect the chance they will include recommended practices (Ruppar, Neeper & Dalsen, 2016).

The goal of this research is to examine UW-L's preservice teachers' preparedness to teach in inclusive classrooms. I would also like to investigate whether there is a difference in responses to teacher self-efficacy for inclusion between PSTs first entering the program (i.e., "pre-block") and PSTs in "Field 1, Field 2, and "Student Teaching". Based on my initial research I completed with peers in my "pre-block" (i.e., EDS 311) class in the fall of 2018, it appears students still are not feeling prepared to teach students with disabilities. To ensure the conclusions I drew are correct, more research is need. Additional research is also needed to identify ways to ensure all teachers feel better prepared to teach the diverse students who will be present in their future classrooms, and to include preparing all teachers to effectively teach students with exceptional learning needs. I plan to survey PSTs that are currently in pre-block, field 1, field 2, and student teaching to gather more evident information.

References

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C. Objectives / Specific Aims

I plan on audiotaping and surveying PSTs that are currently in pre-block, field 1, field 2 and student teaching. I will ask questions from the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice Scale and analyze the survey data by transcribing. My methods will let me observe and answer the research questions presented below.

- As a preservice teacher, how prepared do you currently feel to teach all students in the classroom, including students with disabilities?
- Do preservice teachers feel confident in their ability to create and sustain these classrooms?
- As measured by the inclusivity scale on the Teacher efficacy scale, what suggestions for impacting pre-service general education teachers' beliefs and self-efficacy have been shared?

D. Methods

Participants

Surveys. UW-L students participating in the following classes in the fall of 2019 will be asked to complete surveys: EDS 311, EDS 402, EDS 445, and EDS 492. There should be at least 30 students in each of these groups. The survey will include the TEIP questions (Loreman et al., 2012) as well as the following additional questions:

- What classes are you currently enrolled in (e.g., EDS 402)?

- What certification are you currently seeking (e.g., special education)?
- What is your age?
- What is your confidence level in teaching students with disabilities (e.g., Very low, Low, Average, High, Very high)?
- Knowledge of inclusion law and policy? (None, Poor, Average, Good, Very Good)
- Significant prior interactions with individuals with disabilities? (None, Some, High)
- Previous teacher experiences with students with disabilities? (None, Some, High)
- Would you be willing to join a follow-up focus group to share more information? If so, please share your name and contact information here:

An IRB has been submitted and approved in order to survey PSTs that are currently enrolled in pre-block, field 1, field 2, and student teaching.

Focus Groups. Four focus groups will be used, which will consist of general education PSTs in pre-block, field 1, field 2, and student teaching in order to gather more information to contextualize the survey results. Participants will be asked to elaborate on the bulleted questions listed above. Ten participants from each group will be randomly selected to participate in these focus groups. I will independently lead these focus groups and will record all sessions using my iPad.

Design Overview

Statistical analyses. This research will use a mixed methods approach to investigate the results. The qualitative data will be analyzed using the statistical software, SPSS. I will download the Qualtrics survey results and upload those directly into the SPSS software. All available data will be included in the analysis. If participants fail to answer all questions, their

remaining answers will still be used in my analysis. As has been done in previous studies, I will use an analysis of variance in order to investigate the potential influence of the selected demographic variables measured by the TEIP scale (Loreman et al., 2012).

Interview analysis methods. In order to conduct the qualitative analysis, I will familiarize myself with the data by reading all the focus group interviews and then using a thematic analysis to analyze responses related to the questions shared above. This information will primarily be used to contextualize the qualitative results and provide recommendations for next steps.

E. Final Products and Dissemination

My goal is to submit a proposal and present a poster at the International Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Expo and Convention occurring in February of 2020. Having the opportunity to share my research at this conference, which is attended by special education teachers and parents, will allow the audience to learn about a topic that is important for the educational system.

I also aim to get my research published as a journal. There is currently such limited information on this topic and further analyzation is crucial to improve PSTs perceptions about inclusion.

F. Budget justification

Funding will give me adequate time to survey PSTs and investigate the data provided. It will take me 40 hours to complete the initial research and 4 hours to complete the focus groups. Approximately a total of 120 hours (3 weeks) will be needed to conduct and analyze the data.

2. Letter of Support