Creating a Disabled Speakers' Bureau to Influence Policy and Practice in Teacher Preparation

AUTHORS
Lauren Zepp
Briannah Busch
Courtney L. Wilt

Journal of Special Education Preparation
6(1), 16-24

DOI: https://doi.org/10.33043/fnesrn-kutcc

ABSTRACT

This article outlines the creation of a Disabled Speakers' Bureau that centers disabled and neurodivergent preservice educators as leaders and contributors to teacher preparation. The bureau functions as both a learning community and a feedback structure, in which participants share lived experiences, advise on policy and program design, and mentor peers. Grounded in disability justice and neurodiversity frameworks, this initiative positions disability as a source of professional expertise rather than a deficit (Berne et al., 2018; Botha et al., 2025). Potential outcomes for teacher education programs embracing this approach include stronger self-advocacy; increased retention of disabled preservice teachers, thereby improving disability representation and epistemology in PK-12 schools; and improved faculty understanding of accessibility and inclusion. For special education teacher educators, this model offers a practical pathway for embedding disabled voice and leadership in teacher education and working toward the goals of retaining neurodivergent and/or disabled teacher candidates and highlighting less medicalized and stigmatizing views of disability within special education. This article offers implementation steps, lessons learned, and recommendations for reimagining diversity and inclusion as dynamic, participatory, and continually evolving practices.

KEYWORDS

Disability studies, lived experience, neurodivergence, self-advocacy, teacher preparation

Prior to a new semester, Dr. Johnson prepared to teach an introductory special education course by reviewing syllabi and updating materials to reflect new research and changes in the field. She was proud of her efforts to ensure preservice teachers (PSTs) were exposed to concepts related to diversity and equity, such as culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive education. She felt particularly invested in addressing inclusive education, as this course was required for all education majors but was the only opportunity for those not majoring in special education to learn about students with disabilities.

Given current data showing most students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their school day in general education settings (Irwin et al., 2024), Dr. Johnson focused her course on practical strategies for accommodations, modifications, and co-teaching in inclusive classrooms. She passionately believed that all educators needed to develop self-efficacy for teaching students with disabilities, as these skills would influence their decision-making around students' access to the general education curriculum (Ruppar et al., 2017). Therefore, she supplemented the course textbook with video examples of instruction, hands-on activities, and role-playing of individualized education program (IEP) teams. As the semester progressed, Dr. Johnson received feedback from PSTs, several of whom mentioned their own experiences as disabled and neurodivergent learners. Some noted that the medical model of disability emphasized in the textbook felt cold and clinical. Others shared how their own experiences with special and

> This work centers disabled PSTs as knowledge producers with insight into accessibility, pedagogy, and inclusive practices. This knowledge—rooted in lived experience—challenges traditional hierarchies of expertise by situating disabled PSTs not as case studies for analysis, but as emerging scholars and practitioners who shape program culture and direction.

inclusive education contrasted with the information presented in course materials and expressed an interest in incorporating those experiences into their assignments.

Valuing her students' feedback, Dr. Johnson reflected on the course content. Despite the emphasis on inclusive practices, her course materials did not reflect the voices of people with disabilities. She also realized that she had not considered that some PSTs may identify as disabled and had unintentionally framed the course almost entirely for an audience without disabilities. She endeavored to make changes for future semesters, but how could she affirm disabled PSTs and find opportunities for all PSTs to engage directly with people with lived experience of disability?

Statement of the Problem

A multitude of non-disabled and neurotypical norms and their mechanisms of enforcement function to position disabled and neurodivergent persons as either in need or invisible (Keefe, 2022). This rings true for disabled PSTs, who, despite ongoing calls for inclusive teacher preparation, experience limited opportunities to contribute their expertise toward that reality (Neca et al., 2022; Strimel et al., 2023). Instead, their lived experiences—rich with insights about accessibility, belonging, and classroom realities—are often filtered through academic discourse rather than being invited into it. As Dr. Johnson discovered, the structure of educator preparation courses often assumes a non-disabled audience, reinforcing a norm in which disabled PSTs' experiential and embodied knowledge is invisibilized or undermined by medicalized rhetoric (Snider et al., 2024). This dynamic subtly signals that disability expertise resides outside the classroom or in scholarship rather than within the bodies and experiences of disabled educators themselves. In turn, self-advocacy and opportunities for connection are suppressed, contributing to the overall precarity disabled PSTs experience when faced with instructors who assume that teachers must not be disabled. In recognition that disability can be an inherent part of a person's identity and affirmation that the value and worth of an individual is not separate from their disability (Brown, 2020; Haller, 2016), we use identity-first language throughout this paper to describe disabled people, including those who identify as neurodivergent. Too often, disabled PSTs are pressured to shrink themselves and their needs (often without accommodation) to prove they deserve to be enrolled in teacher preparation and/or to avoid ableist assumptions about their competencies (Neca et al., 2022; VanUitert et al., 2025b). Without intentional mechanisms to surface, honor, and elevate disabled PSTs' perspectives, programs risk reproducing systemic ableism under the guise of inclusion.

Recognizing that she needed more support to affirm disabled PSTs and center disabled voices more intentionally in coursework, Dr. Johnson raised the issue with other faculty and former students. These conversations planted the seed of a new idea – inviting disabled college students to serve as guest speakers in the introductory special education course so they could share their lived experiences. Dr. Johnson first asked two students who had shared their identity as disabled students if they would be interested in speaking to future classes. They agreed and presented on their experiences with inclusive education.

The student response was overwhelmingly positive, and more disabled PSTs volunteered to speak during future semesters. A blind student joined the group of speakers, describing assistive technologies and ways teachers can make learning accessible. After each presentation, PSTs indicated how helpful the guest speakers were for making sense of what they were learning. Dr. Johnson was deeply grateful to disabled PSTs for their willingness to share, but she wondered if there was broader potential to formalize guest speaking and build community around shared identities. Perhaps a formal structure could reach a bigger audience and even contribute to reimaging teacher preparation and challenging ableist norms in higher education.

One intentional approach to affirm and amplify the experience of disabled PSTs is a Disabled Speakers' Bu-

TABLE 1: Replication Checklist

Phase	Action items
Foundational planning	☐ Identify a leadership team. ☐ Explore institutional requirements for student organizations. ☐ Develop governing documents as required by campus policy. ☐ Complete required institutional training.
Mission and goal development	☐ Co-construct a mission statement. ☐ Develop initial goals to help achieve the mission statement. ☐ Include participation options that do not require disability disclosure.
Organizational structures	☐ Establish a monthly or bi-monthly meeting schedule. ☐ Offer flexible modes for attendance and participation. ☐ Ensure meeting spaces are accessible.
Recruitment and visibility	☐ Create a logo or use the provided logo in Figure 1. ☐ Develop and disseminate accessible recruitment flyers and materials.
Member orientation and community building	☐ Hold an orientation to introduce the organization's purpose, mission, and opportunities for involvement. ☐ Include opportunities to develop shared norms. ☐ Plan activities to develop public speaking skills and build community.
Leadership and speaker development	☐ Support members in developing professional introductions. ☐ Build skills for advocacy and public speaking. ☐ Provide opportunities for practice and feedback. ☐ Cultivate members' strengths, interests, and advocacy goals.
Core programming and partnerships	☐ Collaborate with faculty and university units. ☐ Create a system for organizing speaking engagements. ☐ Advocate for accessibility throughout campus.
Ethical considerations and power sharing	☐ Ensure participation remains voluntary and flexible. ☐ Avoid tokenization by distributing opportunities across members. ☐ Establish rules for the use of personal narratives and shared materials. ☐ Acknowledge and mitigate hierarchical power dynamics between students and faculty.
Sustainability planning	☐ Secure institutional funding or structural support. ☐ Develop leadership succession and mentorship processes. ☐ Archive organizational documents for historical purposes. ☐ Hold annual planning and reflection sessions.

reau—a structured, replicable framework that places disabled PSTs into roles of leadership, mentorship, and policy influence. This work centers disabled PSTs as knowledge producers with insight into accessibility, pedagogy, and inclusive practices. This knowledge—rooted in lived experience—challenges traditional hierarchies of expertise by situating disabled PSTs not as case studies for analysis, but as emerging scholars and practitioners who shape program culture and direction. We contend that disability-informed expertise is not supplementary to teacher education—it is foundational. Therefore, a Disabled Speakers' Bureau offers a pathway to concretely enact this belief and (re) shape rhetoric on inclusion within teacher preparation programs.

Conceptual Frameworks

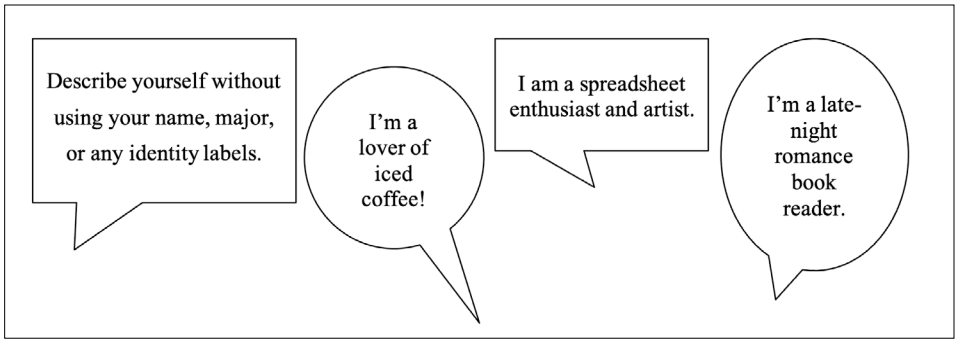
Frameworks positioning disabled and neurodivergent identities as sources of expertise rather than as deficits or burdens serve as the foundation

TABLE 2: Initial Goals for the Disabled Speakers' Bureau

Goal Number	Description
Goal 1	Center disabled PSTs as knowledgeable agents of change rather than passive participants or bystanders to accessibility and inclusion efforts.
Goal 2	Build community around shared identities for disabled college students, a demographic traditionally marginalized on college campuses.
Goal 3	Influence policies and instructional practices in teacher education by advocating for more accessible and inclusive learning environments.

FIGURE 1: Disabled Speakers' Bureau Logo

FIGURE 2: Warm-Up Prompt with Sample Responses



for our Disabled Speakers' Bureau (Botha et al., 2025; Dwyer, 2022; Kapp, 2020). Scholars in the field of disability studies have long advocated for recognition of disabled people's lived experiences as critical sites for knowledge production, offering insights into pedagogy, accessibility, and policy that cannot be obtained through other means (Clifton et al., 2025; Garland-Thomson, 2020; Loja et al., 2013). Increasingly, teacher preparation seeks to integrate such perspectives through disability studies in education (Baglieri et al., 2011; Lukins et al., 2023). These shifting values are reflected in ways that disrupt traditional notions of teacher education research and practice, such as re-examining who is positioned as capable of becoming an effective educator (Snider et al., 2024). From this perspective, disabled pre- and in-service teachers are not merely recipients of programming but also co-constructors of essential knowledge and agents of change in education.

As part of these shifting values, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) explicitly affirmed the importance of supporting disabled pre- and in-service educators, recognizing their lived experiences as valuable sources of insight and expertise within inclusive education (CEC, 2016). Further, including disabled PSTs may help to cultivate and retain a diverse educator workforce and align with the broader goals of inclusive education (Pugach et al., 2014). Taken together, these frameworks serve as a foundation for conceptualizing disability not as a limitation but as a vital form of knowledge that shapes more equitable and humanizing approaches to teacher preparation.

Creating a Disabled Speakers' Bureau

Drawing on our experience, we recommend a step-by-step process, detailed in Table 1, for creating a Disabled Speakers' Bureau. First, create a founding leadership team with interested parties to explore opportunities for institutional support and attaining status as a recognized student organization. Depending on the required procedures, this may involve drafting a constitution and attending training on budgeting and federal mandates (e.g., the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX). At this stage, the team can formally identify students to serve as president, treasurer, and secretary, as well as a faculty advisor for the campus-based organization. A sample constitution and leadership structure are provided in the supplemental file.

The leadership team can then develop a mission statement and goals for the organization. Goals should prioritize learning from those with lived experiences of disability, creating opportunities for disabled PSTs to identify barriers to access, and emphasizing avenues for change (Strimel et al., 2023; Snider et al., 2024). Table 2

TABLE 3: Steps for Building the Elevator Pitch

Step	Prompts	Example
Step 1: Who I Am	• Your name and pronouns, if you feel safe to share them • Your role or major/year • A strength, passion, or personality trait	"I'm Dante and I use he/they pronouns. I'm a junior majoring in special education. I'm passionate about accessible sports and am a member of the wheelchair basketball team."
Step 2: How I Identify	• Disability identity (only if you want to disclose) • Brief insights about how disability shapes your perspective, advocacy, or experiences	"I'm Autistic, which shapes most aspects of my life and how I view the world. It's important to me that people see autism as a normal part of human diversity while also recognizing the need for accommodations and support."
Step 3: Our Shared Mission	• Co-create a 1-2 sentence description of your organization and mission. • Share why the mission is important to you or how you are contributing to the group's goals.	"I joined the disabled speakers' bureau because the mission of creating a more equitable and accessible campus is important to me."

displays our initial goals as an example.

Next, we recommend planning a monthly or bi-monthly meeting schedule with set dates throughout the academic year to help new members commit to participating in the group without feeling overburdened. After scheduling regular meetings, the leadership team can create a logo and recruitment materials to distribute on campus and on social media platforms. See Figure 1 for a sample logo. Although advertising through multiple modalities increases visibility and accessibility, the leadership team should ensure materials meet digital and physical accessibility guidelines (e.g., image descriptions, high contrast, font readability, size). Membership should be voluntary and open to both disabled individuals and allies. By welcoming participants through multiple pathways, we can prioritize accessibility and self-determination, ensuring that members can engage in ways that honor their identities, experiences, and comfort levels (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Additional sample recruitment materials are provided in the supplemental file.

For the initial meeting, we recommend preparing a slideshow to welcome new members and orient them to the Disabled Speakers' Bureau's mission. Explaining how and why this student organization was founded can help build enthusiasm and establish a solid foundation for the work ahead. New members can then share their ideas for achieving the goals set by the leadership committee and raise other issues that could be addressed. Next, consider discussing disability-related language and offering space for students to share their preferences for identity-first or person-first language. It may be helpful to set clear expectations for how the group will discuss disability and other identities, including acknowledging the need to respect an individual's self-description.

As an initial speaking activity, we encouraged participants to practice introducing themselves to other members of the organization using the language they felt most comfortable with. Beginning with a low-pressure prompt to warm up helped reduce anxiety and facilitate community building, as some members were not yet familiar with one another. Figure 2 displays a warm-up prompt with sample responses.

During the next meeting, members can be supported in developing a 30- to 60-second elevator pitch using a three-step process. An elevator pitch is a short introduction that communicates who you are, what you do, and what matters to you in a brief amount of time (Gaffey, 2014). Table 3 presents steps for building the pitch, including prompts and student examples. Members should be given time to practice their pitches with a partner before sharing with the larger group. The elevator pitch guidance should encourage participants to include their name and pronouns, year in school, area of study, personal interests or passions, optional disability identity disclosure, and an additional personal detail such as a hobby or goal. A more detailed activity guide is available in the supplemental file.

Subsequent meetings can be dedicated to sustaining member engagement, strengthening advocacy skills, and collaborating with university faculty and other university entities, such as technology integration and professional development for instructors. During these sessions, members might examine common instructional technologies used in both teacher preparation coursework and daily student life, providing feedback grounded in their experiences as disabled users. For example, on our campus, members col-

TABLE 4: Topics and Potential Audiences

Topics:	Potential Audience(s):
• Lived experiences with specific disabilities • Identity-first vs. person-first language • Assistive technology demonstrations • Advocating for and accessing accommodations • Neurodiversity-affirming practices • Experience using screen readers and other digital accessibility tools • Accessible housing	• Introduction to special education courses • Instructional methods courses • Center for students with disabilities events • Prospective students • Field experience coordinators • Department and faculty meetings • Student affairs office and university housing

laborated with the campus technology integration center to discuss the need for digital accessibility and share their experiences using assistive technologies such as screen readers and closed captions (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2024). Through sessions like this, PSTs' insights can influence faculty understanding of how disabled students experience instruction, fostering improved student access. These contributions also showcase the influence PSTs can have on instructional design, thereby reinforcing accessibility as a central component of teacher education.

Additional meetings should focus on building knowledge about disability history and identities, as well as preparing members for speaking engagements. In our campus-based Disabled Speakers' Bureau, members engaged in discussion about person-first and identity-first language, sharing their preferences and acknowledging the complex history of disability identity. Members also brainstormed ways faculty can reduce reliance on individual disability disclosure and instead design courses that anticipate diverse learner variability by examining and reflecting on how disabled PSTs experience accommodations processes. These proactive engagements not only challenge stereotypical assumptions about people who require accommodations and the reasons for them, but also support faculty in shifting from abstract, compliance-driven approaches to implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in their pedagogy (CAST, 2024). By engaging in these discussions, PSTs can reflect on and help shape institutional norms, language policies, and practices that model inclusion and respect in teacher education.

Advocacy efforts can also extend to broader campus accessibility, including university housing and dining. Members might share their experiences in residence and dining halls, highlighting physical, sensory, and environmental barriers (e.g., doorway widths, furniture arrangements, lighting, noise levels). As a group, they might offer recommendations for improving the accessibility of room layouts, increasing the clarity of signage (e.g., print size, Braille, multiple languages), or improving the usability of kiosks in dining halls. These recommendations could emphasize the design of university spaces and systems with embedded accessibility in anticipation of diverse student body needs, rather than focusing on individual requests. Of note, the student labor involved in these activities should be made explicit and either compensated or otherwise honored through mutual agreement (e.g., via formal recognition). By no means is this work meant to replace the university's responsibility for accessibility improvements and legal guidelines. However, by integrating disabled PSTs into evaluations and discussions, the Disabled Speakers' Bureau can not only identify barriers and proposed solutions but also inform institutional policies and operational practices toward an accessible campus environment for all students, faculty, and guests. Table 4 summarizes topics and potential audiences for the bureau's work.

Navigating Challenges

Considering the complex interplay among power relations, cultural factors associated with vulnerability, and institutional contexts, disability disclosure in higher education can pose challenges for students and faculty alike (Brown, 2020; Strimel et al., 2023). Although there are potential benefits associated with disability disclosure, such as access to accommodations, there are also associated dangers of stigma, questions of competence, and marginalization (Brown, 2020). Such risks may be exacerbated by the hierarchical nature of higher education, particularly in special education teacher preparation, which has historically framed disability as a deficit requiring remediation or a cure (Keefe, 2022).

These factors might deter disabled PSTs from disclosing their disability (Dolmage, 2017; Price, 2011). Therefore, individuals and programs aiming to position disabled PSTs as leaders must acknowledge power dynamics and provide meaningful pathways to participation that do not require disability disclosure. Further, we caution against framing disability disclosure

as inherently empowering and instead advocate for institutional shifts that broaden accessibility and challenge ableist norms (Dwyer, 2022). Additionally, we recognize that the risks of structural ableism, such as tokenization and exploitation, require careful consideration throughout each step of this work (Keefe, 2022). It is essential that efforts to learn from any traditionally marginalized community include recognition and compensation for the labor involved, and participation must remain voluntary for students and faculty alike.

Outcomes and Reflections

After helping to establish a Disabled Speakers' Bureau, Dr. Johnson began noticing small but meaningful changes on campus. As a recognized student organization, the Disabled Speakers' Bureau had grown from a few volunteers speaking in her classes to a more established presence within the teacher education program. Faculty and instructors regularly invited group members to speak about their identities and experiences in courses. Members also participated in panels aimed at improving accessibility and disability representation in course materials, which faculty and administrators received positively. These efforts helped launch discussions among teacher education faculty about how to more explicitly model UDL in coursework, illustrating a shift from theory to tangible changes such as flexible assignment formats, multiple modalities for accessing content, and the integration of student voice.

*In the larger teacher education program, the Disabled Speakers' Bureau participated in a focus group to provide feedback on a revised student teaching handbook that detailed accessibility requirements and reflected a more affirming approach to neurodivergent and disabled educators entering the profession. The faculty then revised a letter to cooperating teachers, clearly outlining expectations for student teaching, including information on accommodations and support for disabled educators. The Office of Field Experiences also began planning revisions to the professional dispositions rubric used to evaluate student teachers, aiming to remove ableist and exclusionary expectations (e.g., eye contact, affect) and add elements related to advocacy and disability-affirming language. These specific actions were undertaken to increase the retention of disabled PSTs in the program, as the transition to field experiences had historically been challenging. Although incremental, these changes reflected the impact of learning directly from disabled individual*s.

Implications for Special Education Teacher Educators

Although the work of a Disabled Speakers' Bureau can inspire the reframing of teacher education, there remains a critical need for coordinated shifts in programming and instruction. Learning from disabled PSTs and listening to student voices are necessary but insufficient without structural change within the field of special education teacher preparation. Toward that goal, we advocate for specific programmatic shifts and intentional connections to the broader goals of inclusive education.

Programmatic Shifts

Teacher preparation programs and accrediting bodies, such as CEC and the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2022), should take steps to embed disabled students' voices within formal processes, including accreditation reviews, program evaluations, and advisory councils. This move would position students with disabilities as integral to the continuous endeavor of inclusivity and institutional access. Doing so offers a means of protection against symbolic inclusion and instead incentivizes structures for funding, staffing, and other support for participatory initiatives that can be sustained over time. In this way, student voices are positioned as a foundational component of high-quality programming rather than a peripheral or discretionary element that is vulnerable to diminished accountability or discontinuation when external funding or individual leadership changes. These procedural moves would, in turn, facilitate additional benefits to the field, such as redefining professional standards.

Programs must actively interrogate and disrupt dominant constructions of professionalism that position disability—particularly neurodivergence—as incompatible with effective teaching. Although professional dispositions are often framed as neutral indicators of readiness, they are frequently ill-defined and grounded in neurotypical norms related to communication, affect, and behavioral conformity, allowing them to function as subjective gatekeeping mechanisms rather than valid measures of instructional competence (VanUitert et al., 2025b; O'Dwyer, 2022). Rather than treating disability as a liability to be mitigated, teacher education programs should explicitly recognize disability-related traits—such as adaptability, persistence, and relational attunement—as professional assets that strengthen inclusive practice and advocacy (Bialka, 2015; Broderick & Lalvani, 2017). Accordingly, programs should revise disposition rubrics and assessment tools to prioritize observable teaching practices, reflective growth, and access-oriented competencies, thereby reducing subjectivity and advancing

equity-centered preparation.

Connecting to Broader Goals of Inclusive Education

Programmatic shifts should align with other strategies centering disability justice in higher education and teacher preparation spaces. At the level of everyday instructional practice, this means normalizing conversations about access, modeling the use of accommodations as routine tools for participation, and resisting narratives that position disabled students as objects of sympathy or exception. For example, teaching instructional methods from a disability studies framework has recently been shown to enhance student understanding of accommodations while reducing deficit-based or pity-oriented responses to disability (VanUitert et al., 2025a). Combining disabled student leadership with other practices proven to enhance PST development reinforces inclusive practices as central, rather than peripheral, to educational excellence.

Modeling the intentional creation of programs and systems that imply the inherent value of disabled PSTs and their perspectives, such as the Disabled Speakers' Bureau, sends a powerful message disrupting the normalization of disability-based exclusion and its harms that remain prevalent in today's schools.

CONCLUSION

Centering disabled PSTs is critical to the forward momentum of meaningful, inclusive education across multiple spheres of influence. Reflecting on the work of the Disabled Speakers' Bureau, Dr. Johnson often describes a shift from accommodating disabled and neurodivergent teacher candidates to collaborating with them in a culture of shared learning. This evolution also supports disability as a valued identity and source of insights, not deficits, in the teacher education program. For faculty, collaborating with the Disabled Speakers' Bureau underscored the value of listening deeply to students and of creating structures that sustain rather than tokenize disabled voices.

The curation of structures and opportunities for advocacy holds untold potential for empowerment and cultural impact. For other teacher education programs and the broader field, the message is clear: If we want to prepare reflective, empathetic, inclusive educators, we must model these values. When we make space for lived experience to lead the conversation, we have the potential to create not only more accessible college classrooms but also a generation of skilled educators prepared to be role models for disabled children, to undo ableism, and to reshape special education in ways that are affirming and aligned with social justice.

REFERENCES

Americans with Disabilities Act. (2024, June 24). *Americans with Disabilities Act Title II Regulations.* https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/regulations/title-ii-2010-regulations/

Baglieri, S., Valle, J. W., Connor, D. J., & Gallagher, D. J. (2011). Disability studies in education: The need for a plurality of perspectives on disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, *32*(4), 267-278. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932510362200

Berne, P., Morales, A. L., Langstaff, D., & Invalid, S. (2018). Ten principles of disability justice. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *46*(1), 227-230. https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2018.0003

Bialka, C. S. (2015). Deconstructing dispositions: Toward a critical ability theory in teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education, 37*(2), 138–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2015.1004602

Botha, M., Gillespie,Lynch, K., Onaiwu, M. G., Jones, D. R., Kim, S. Y., & Obeid, R. (2025). Neurodiversity-affirming intersectional approaches that target public policy: Moving the focus from changing individuals to changing systems of power. *Journal of Social Issues*, *81*(4), e70042. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.70042

Broderick, A., & Lalvani, P. (2017). Dysconscious ableism: Toward a liberatory praxis in teacher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 21*(9), 894-905. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1296034

Brown, N. (2020). Disclosure in academia: A sensitive issue. In N. Brown & J. Leigh (Eds.), *Ableism in Academia: Theorising experiences of disabilities and chronic illnesses in higher education* (pp. 51–73). UCL Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv13xprjr.9

Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. (2022). *Standards for accreditation of educator preparation*. https://caepnet.org/standards/2022-itp/introduction

CAST (2024). *CAST Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0.* http://udlguidelines.cast.org

Clifton, S., Cooper, E., Bourke, J., Connor, S., Denton, S., Dominish, B., Drinkwater, A., Gibellini, C., Gilroy, J., Hallahan, L., Jessep, S., Katterl, S., Mellifont, D., O'Brien, B., Quan Farrant, F., Watharow, A., & Wynn, R. (2025). A framework for disability lived expertise. *Evidence & Policy*. https://doi.org/10.1332/17442648Y2025D000000069

Council for Exceptional Children. (2016). CEC's policy on educators with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, *82*(4), 407-408. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402916651880

Dolmage, J. (2017). *Academic ableism: Disability and higher education*. University of Michigan Press.

Dwyer, P. (2022). The neurodiversity approach(es): What are they and what do they mean for researchers? *Human Development, 66*(2), 73–92. https://doi.org/10.1159/000523723

Gaffey, A. (2014). The elevator pitch. *American Psychology Association (APA)*. https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/files/public_files/Psychological%20Science%20Agenda.pdf

Garland-Thomson, R. (2020). Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory. In *Feminist Theory Reader* (pp. 181–191). Routledge.

Getzel, E. E., & Thoma, C. A. (2008). Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 31*(2), 77– 84. https://doi.org/10.1177/0885728808317658

Haller, B. (2016). *Journalists should learn to carefully traverse a variety of disability terminology.* National Center on Disability and Journalism. https://ncdj.org/2016/01/journalists-should-learn-to-carefully-traverse-a-variety-of-disability-terminology/

Irwin V., Wang K., Jung J., Kessler E., Tezil, T., Alhassani S., Filbey A., Dilig R., & Bullock Mann, F. (2024). *Report on the*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lauren Zepp

Lauren Zepp (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. Her research focuses on special education teacher preparation with two primary strands: (1) building pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills for delivering effective reading instruction and (2) supporting disabled and neurodivergent teacher candidates. She identifies as neurodivergent, serves as the faculty advisor for the Disabled Speakers' Bureau, and is committed to disability justice in education.

Briannah Busch

Briannah Busch (she/they) is a sophomore, undergraduate Special Education major at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater. They identify as multiply disabled and neurodivergent, including being Autistic, ADHD, blind, chronically ill, physically disabled, and having multiple chronic psychiatric disabilities. She serves as the founding president of the Disabled Speakers' Bureau and is a passionate disability advocate.

Courtney Wilt

Courtney Wilt (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. Her research interests include the impact and implementation of special education policy, the experiences of racialized students and their families during the transition to adulthood, and (special) educator discourse on dis/ability and race. She mentors undergraduate research teams in explorations of academic ableism and educator agency/positionality within school systems.

condition of education 2024 (NCES 2024-144). U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024144.pdf

Kapp, S. K. (Ed.). (2020). *Autistic community and the neurodiversity movement: Stories from the frontline.* Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8437-0

Keefe, E. S. (2022). From detractive to democratic: The duty of teacher education to disrupt structural ableism and reimagine disability. *Teachers College Record, 124*(3), 115-147. https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681221086994

Loja, E., Costa, M. E., Hughes, B., & Menezes, I. (2013). Disability, embodiment and ableism: Stories of resistance. *Disability & Society*, *28*(2), 190–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.705057

Lukins, J. M., Lopez, N. B., Sallese, M. R., & Andresen, J. (2023). Fostering inclusive dispositions: Integrating disability studies in teacher education. *Journal of Special Education Preparation*, *3*(3), 4–15. https://doi.org/10.33043/JOSEP.3.3.4-15

Neca, P., Borges, M. L., & Pinto, P. C. (2022). Teachers with disabilities: A literature review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 26*(12), 1192–1210. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1776779

O'Dwyer, A. (2022, May 9). Where are all the neurodivergent teaching professionals? *Sixth Form Colleges Association.* https://www.sixthformcolleges.org/1412/blog-6/post/147/where-are-all-the-neurodivergent-teaching-professionals#

Price, M. (2011). *Mad at school: Rhetorics of mental disability and academic life*. University of Michigan Press.

Pugach, M. C., Blanton, L. P., & Boveda, M. (2014). Working together: Research on the preparation of general education and special education teachers for inclusion and collaboration. In *Handbook of research on special education teacher preparation* (pp. 143-160). Routledge.

Ruppar, A. L., Allcock, H., & Gonsier-Gerdin, J. (2017). Ecological factors affecting access to general education content and contexts for students with significant disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, *38*(1), 53–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932516646856

Snider, J. E., Oosting, A. A., Andersen, A. J., & DeWaard, J. (2024). Learning from self-advocates: Changing perspectives about disability. *Inclusive Practices*, *3*(1-2), 39–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/27324745231224406

Strimel, M. M., Nagro, S. A., Baker, P. H., & Thoma, C. A. (2023). The experiences of teacher candidates with disabilities: A systematic literature review. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 46*(3), 243–259. https://doi.org/10.1177/08884064231170573

VanUitert, V. J., Brown, B., & Santhanam, S. P. (2025a). Exploring the efficacy of disability coursework on preservice teachers' beliefs about disability. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *48*(4), 272–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/08884064251386800

VanUitert, V., Zepp, L., Malone, J., McGuire, S., Newson, A., Deger, G. K., & Core, S. (2025b) A tale of two educators: An observational case study. *Journal of Case Learning & Exceptional Learners*, *1*(5). https://doi.org/10.20429/jclel.2024.000105