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Reframing Behavior: Understanding and Responding to Behavioral Messages of Neurodivergent Students Meaningfully

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ABSTRACT

Neurodivergent students experience the world differently from normative societal standards. Preservice teachers will have neurodivergent students in their classrooms and misinterpretations of behavior may occur. Including the neurodivergent individual's perspective and voice is imperative in creating inclusive, affirming learning environments. The Neurodivergent student Informed Behavior Support (NIBS) plan provides a systematic, collaborative approach that can help preservice teachers to (a) recognize if a behavior needs to be addressed, (b) identify strategies to support student success, and (c) empower students to be actively involved in the process. This article presents details on using the NIBS plan to bridge the gap between neurodivergent students and their teachers.

KEYWORDS

Behavior, Neurodivergent, Special Education, Teacher Education

Dr. Knowles, an assistant professor, is teaching an undergraduate course on classroom and behavior management at her university. Her students are in part-time teaching placements where they teach mathematics and reading lessons to elementary students. During class, Dr. Knowles asks her students about their placements. Thomas, who is assigned to a fifth-grade classroom at Red Apple Elementary School, has an Autistic student named Anthony in his class. Thomas shares that Anthony appears to wander around the classroom, especially during whole class instruction, and that this behavior seems uncontrolled. Thomas says he does not understand why Anthony engages in this behavior and is concerned that it disrupts the learning environment. When Dr. Knowles asks Thomas what strategies he has tried to support Anthony, he says his cooperating teacher requires Anthony to remain in his seat throughout whole group instruction or to "make up" the time during recess. However, Thomas is concerned this punitive discipline practice may not be appropriate and asks Dr. Knowles if she has any suggestions.

Each student and educator is unique and brings their own experiences and perspectives into the classroom. Because classrooms include people with different ways of experiencing the world, these groups are inherently neurodiverse. Neurodiverse classrooms include both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals. The term *neurodivergent* is used to describe a person whose mind works differently from "dominant society standards of normal" (Walker, 2014) and includes those with disabilities such as learning disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, speech and language disabilities, or autism. Approximately 15-20% of people are neurodivergent (Doyle, 2020). In contrast, the term *neurotypical* is used to describe an individual whose mind works within normative societal expectations (Walker, 2014). Not all students with disabilities are considered to be neurodivergent. For example, a Deaf-Blind student is disabled but not neurodivergent, unless they have a co-occurring neurodivergent disability.

Of the 7.5 million students with disabilities served in the United States public school system, the most commonly represented students are neurodivergent (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024). These individuals' diversity of thinking can lead to innovation and advantages for society; however, the strengths of neurodivergent people are often overlooked and underutilized (Austin & Pisano,

2017). Furthermore, attempting to make a neurodivergent student act neurotypical and reduce behaviors that are perceived as "atypical" can be detrimental (Miller et al., 2021). Because about two-thirds of students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their school day in the general education setting (NCES, 2024), the next generation of educators must be prepared with a holistic approach to understanding and engaging with neurodivergent students.

Behavior and Neurodivergent Students

Cooper and colleagues (2020) define behavior as any interaction between a person and their environment, and state that any behavior can be operationalized and measured. What makes a behavior "challenging" is defined by that individual or those around them. The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC, 2017) has provided guidance on challenging behavior, indicating that one's culture, background, race/ethnicity, and bias determine what is considered challenging about a behavior. Development, temperament, environment, and disability can also impact the way a child's behavior is perceived (DEC, 2017). Additionally, a misalignment in neurotypes between a teacher and a student (e.g., a neurotypical teacher and a neurodivergent student) can lead to misinterpretation of behavior in the classroom. Behaviors may also be misinterpreted due to the context of the environment the student is in, the development of the child, or their disability status (Kelly et al., 2024). Students who are traditionally marginalized and minoritized are subjected to higher rates of exclusionary discipline, often due to misunderstandings of behavior, bias, or limited relationships (Blacher & Eisenhower, 2023; Glock & Kleen, 2023; Love & Beneke, 2021; Zee et al., 2020).

Behavioral Intervention

When "challenging" behaviors occur, special education teachers, general education teachers, and behavior specialists often rely on behavior analytic principles and the completion of a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) to identify why that behavior is occurring (Cooper et al., 2020; O'Neill et al., 2014). The information gained from an FBA allows practitioners to develop a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) that contains function-based interventions and supports tailored for an individual student (Cooper et al., 2020; O'Neill et al., 2014). Function-based interventions are both antecedent-based (i.e., implemented before a behavior occurs as a proactive strategy) and consequence-based (i.e., implemented after a behavior occurs to reinforce it). BIPs also include replacement behaviors to teach in place of a target behavior (McGuire & Meadan, 2023).

Best practice and legal expectations indicate that families should be involved in their child's educational programming, including the FBA/BIP process, yet they are often excluded (Slade et al., 2018). Although children themselves can also add to their educational progress in positive ways when they are included in the FBA/BIP process, they are often left out (Johnson & Carpenter, 2022; McKenna et al., 2016). There can be multiple barriers to success throughout this process, including limited resources, improper training, and ineffective implementation (Horner & Yell, 2017). Recommendations to improve the FBA/BIP process point strongly toward the need for additional training of school-based practitioners. Evidence indicates that when practitioners are provided with adequate training, they can implement function-based strategies that are both effective and inexpensive (Horner & Yell, 2017). Such training can be multifaceted and should begin in preservice preparation. There are several critical components to this training. First, preservice teachers must fully understand the steps involved in conducting an FBA and developing a BIP. Second, preservice teachers should be taught to work with families and students in a way that allows their voices to be incorporated into the FBA/BIP process. Finally, preservice teachers should learn to develop BIPs that incorporate the diverse experiences of neurodivergent individuals.

To better prepare preservice teachers, we have developed a systematic plan grounded in behavior analytic principles (Cooper et al., 2020) for developing behavioral plans for neurodivergent students. The *Neurodivergent student Informed Behavior Support (NIBS)* plan incorporates the traditional steps of the FBA/BIP process but also includes additional steps that highlight the importance of recognizing the unique strengths and needs of neurodivergent learners through function-based supports and intervention. The steps outlined in this paper can be used by higher education faculty during teacher preparation courses such as introduction to special education, methods, or behavior management, as well as during field placements where preservice special education teachers have an opportunity to implement the strategies. Faculty can further model these practices in their college classrooms and create assignments for their students to reflect and apply strategies to various scenarios.

Neurodivergent Behavior in Neurodiverse Settings

Dr. Knowles has been learning about the neurodiversity paradigm and is exploring ways to make behavior planning more student informed. She recognizes that Thomas (and other students in her

TABLE 1: Examples of Sensory Modulation Across Senses

SENSE	HYPERSENSITIVITY (SENSORY AVOIDING)	HYPOSENSITIVITY (SENSORY SEEKING)
Visual	• Dislikes bright light • Notices particles in the air	• Is attracted to light • Has difficulty identifying what an object is without using other senses (e.g., touching it)
Auditory	• Dislikes loud noises (e.g., fire alarm, thunder, car horn) • Covers ears or tries to leave a noisy area	• Likes to be in noisy places (e.g., crowds) • Creates their own sounds (e.g., drums on the table, hums)
Tactile	• Avoids wearing clothing with certain textures • Avoids eating foods with certain textures • Dislikes brushing teeth or hair • Dislikes wearing shoes • Is sensitive to temperatures	• Likes being squeezed or hugged tightly • Prefers tight clothing • Is prone to injury due to not recognizing when injured • Enjoys touching different textures
Gustatory	• Prefers bland food • Avoids spicy food	• Mixes different types of food together to make new flavors • Seeks spicy, sour, or sweet foods
Olfactory	• Becomes nauseated by certain food smells • Avoids or appears distressed by smells in the environment (e.g., soap, perfume, air freshener).	• Seeks out objects or foods to smell • Has a high tolerance for unpleasant odors • Struggles to differentiate one smell from another
Proprioception	• Wears loose clothing • Appears tired • Is sensitive to pain	• Walks to tiptoes • Runs • Flaps hands
Vestibular	• Stays in one position for a long period of time • Sits on feet • Avoids escalators or elevators	• Rocks body • Stims • Jumps • Spins without getting dizzy
Interoception	• Is over aware of body sensations (e.g., heart beating) which can cause anxiety • Overeats or overuses the bathroom to reduce the feeling of certain sensations	• Does not readily recognize hunger, thirst, or need to use the bathroom, requiring reminders to perform actions to meet these needs

*Note. These are only examples of how sensory modulation can appear in the classroom. Students may not engage in exactly these behaviors or only these behaviors when trying to meet a sensory need. These examples should serve as a starting point of how behaviors can be used to meet certain needs. Teachers should observe and recognize individual students' behaviors and consider their alignment with these examples. Importantly, hyper and hyposensitivity are not static, so a student may seek stimuli one day and try to avoid it another day.

class) may be misunderstanding Anthony's behavior. She decides to discuss neurodivergent experiences that may contribute to the behaviors her students see in classrooms. Dr. Knowles tells Thomas, "I think to support Anthony, we should discuss neurodivergent behavior, how we interpret it, and what our goals are for addressing it."

Neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals often misinterpret each other's behavior. Milton (2012) posits that the breakdown of understanding between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals is reciprocal. Neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals each tend to communicate more effectively with people with neurotypes similar to their own (Crompton et al., 2020). When neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals try to communicate with each other, misunderstandings are likely to arise due to *both* individuals struggling to understand one another. This can be likened to playing video games. Games are configured to work on certain video game platforms. For instance, Xbox games work well on the Xbox platform and PlayStation games work well on a PlayStation console. However, if an Xbox game is put into a PlayStation console, it will not work. Importantly, this does not mean something is wrong with the PlayStation console because it cannot run the Xbox game. Similarly, people with different neurotypes have different communication needs, norms, and styles that need to be honored. Personal interactions and interpretations of others' behaviors are informed by previous experiences and biases, both of which can contribute to misunderstandings.

Although not an all-encompassing discussion of the neurodivergent characteristics that are often misunderstood,

TABLE 2: Common Neurodivergent Characteristics & Strategies for Support

NEURODIVERGENT CHARACTERISTIC	COMMON SIGNS	ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES AND PROACTIVE STRATEGIES
Sensory Needs	• Avoids or seeks sensory stimuli • Avoids or seeks food with potent or bland flavors • Prefers loose clothing • Walks on tiptoes • Moves frequently or infrequently	• Reduce or add natural lighting • Avoid music • Allow movement (e.g., wiggle seats) • Have snacks available • Provide a bathroom schedule • Offer noise-cancelling headphones • Remove strong odors
Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (Dobson, 2022; Rooney, 2021)	• Withdrawal • Negative self-talk • Rumination on past conversations or situations • Fear of failure	• Teaching strategies to move on to other options • Examine alternative reasons why a situation is happening • Share and model mistakes or "failure" and how to navigate
BIMS (Burnout, Inertia, Meltdown, Shutdown; Buckle et al., 2021; Higgins et al., 2021; Phung et al., 2021; Raymaker et al., 2020)	• Intense exhaustion • Appearance of masking • Loss of function • Chronic life stress • Lack of participation in desirable activities • Withdrawal	• Provide time for recovery • Address social issues and sensory needs within the environment • Introduce a peer co-working system • Provide distractions (e.g., visual activities) • Give space for students to participate in activities they enjoy • Provide positive interactions with peers or class pets • Teach strategies such as mindfulness • Provide scaffolding (e.g., valuing students' goals) • Support collaborative regulation

Note: Although each column lists common characteristics or supports, neurodivergent students are individuals with unique characteristics, strengths, and needs. Therefore, educational teams should work together to develop an individualized NIBS plan that is most effective for the student.

this section presents common ones that some may perceive to be "problematic" (Hartman et al., 2023; Phung et al., 2021). Preservice teachers must be able to recognize the characteristics of such behaviors and be prepared to respond. Teacher educators may also observe these characteristics in neurodivergent preservice teachers.

Behavior and Sensory Needs

Everyone is familiar with the visual, auditory, tactile, taste, and smell senses; however, humans also have additional senses for proprioception (i.e., body's position and orientation within space), vestibular (i.e., sense of balance, posture, and movement), and interoception (i.e., internal sensations such as hunger or thirst). Each person has a unique sensory profile which influences how they feel and respond to their environment (Hartman et al., 2023). The way in which an individual regulates their responses to sensory input (i.e., sensory modulation) is also different from one person to the next (Brown et al., 2019). A person's reactions to stimuli can be *hypersensitive* (i.e., over-response to a stimulus) or *hyposensitive* (i.e., under-response to a stimulus; Hartman et al., 2023). As a person engages in sensory modulation, they are "assessing sensory inputs for relevance, and justifying the nervous system's response to those inputs" (May-Benson & Schaaf, 2015, p. 635). This modulation and response results in behaviors that may be interpreted as appropriate or inappropriate/challenging. Table 1 includes examples of behaviors that can be related to sensory modulation.

Behavior and Emotional Regulation

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD) is one example of emotional dysregulation characterized as an intense emotional response to actual or perceived rejection that can lead to the experience of physical pain (Bedrossian, 2021; Dodson, 2022). The feelings associated with RSD may lead to behavioral responses that could be interpreted as challenging. Although this phenomenon is typically associated with ADHD, it is not exclusive to those with this diagnosis (Dahlstrom, 2024). Students may exhibit RSD by (a) becoming easily embarrassed, (b) having strong emotional reactions to perceived rejection, (c) setting high expectations that are challenging for them to meet, (d) experiencing anxiety in social settings, (e)

having relationship difficulties leading, at times, to avoiding social situations, and (f) believing they are a failure when they do not meet what they perceive as other's expectations (Bedrossian, 2021). Dodson (2022) describes RSD as being triggered by teasing, criticism, real or perceived rejection, or chronic negative self-talk and resulting in a variety of behavioral responses. Suggestions for mitigating these responses are available in Table 2.

Behavior and Self-Regulation

Burnout, Inertia, Meltdowns, and Shutdowns (BIMS) are neurodivergent experiences associated with self-regulation difficulties (Phung et al., 2021). *Burnout* refers to an intense exhaustion associated with trying to mask (i.e., hiding personal traits when interacting with others; Pryke-Hobbes et al., 2023) to avoid stigma and discrimination (Phung et al., 2021; Raymaker et al., 2020). *Inertia* can lead to an individual not being able to participate in activities they want or need to do (Phung et al., 2021). This can be misunderstood as a person avoiding their work or being lazy when, in reality, they do not know where to start. *Meltdowns* are externalized expressions of anxiety and emotion in overwhelming situations, while *shutdowns* are internalized experiences of anxiety and emotion. Meltdowns and shutdowns are often equated with the fight, flight, or freeze response one may experience in response to a perceived threat. BIMS experiences have negative implications for students' learning. Historically, people have viewed these behaviors as a sign of laziness, resistance, or aggression; however, to support neurodivergent students' learning, it is necessary to view these behaviors "with curiosity, compassion and a spirit of collaboration" (Phung et al., 2021, p. 11). Teacher educators can ensure their preservice students understand what BIMS are so they are better able to support their students who experience them.

CREATING UPDATED BEHAVIOR PLANS LEVERAGING STUDENT VOICE: NIBS STEP-BY-STEP

After Dr. Knowles teaches the class about contributors to neurodivergent behavior, Thomas says, "It's really interesting that neurodivergent people have these experiences. I can see how that might impact their behavior in school." He pauses before asking, "But what do I do about it? It's great to understand why Anthony might be behaving that way but how do I fix it?"

Dr. Knowles responds, "That is a great question. We are not trying to fix Anthony. Our goal is not to make him act like he is neurotypical. However, if there is a chance a behavior might be distracting or harmful for him or his peers, it would be helpful to develop a neurodivergent student informed behavior support (NIBS) plan."

"What's that?" asks Thomas.

Dr. Knowles explains that NIBS plans are like an FBA/BIP in that they use behavior analytic principles to collect behavioral data and develop a behavior plan using function-based behavior strategies. However, NIBS plans go beyond a traditional FBA/BIP to include student voice and create a more inclusive environment.

Dr. Knowles displays a copy of a NIBS plan template. She invites Thomas to work through the plan with Anthony in mind as an example. Thomas acts as the general education teacher in the scenario, and another student who shares his school placement, Asha, acts as the special education teacher. Dr. Knowles supports the students through the NIBS process and invites the rest of the class to contribute to the discussion. She also encourages Thomas to have a conversation with his cooperating teacher to gain more information about Anthony and to seek permission to talk more with Anthony and Anthony's family as outlined in the plan. Supplemental Figure 1 includes the plan the class created.

Phase 1: Initial Meeting

Prior to addressing student behavior, teachers should hold an initial meeting with other educators and related support professionals that work with the student to discuss the nature of the target behavior and the context in which it occurs. To prepare for this step, preservice teachers must first learn to define a target behavior. This definition must be objective, measurable, and free from personal perceptions or bias. For example, Anthony's teacher may be inclined to state, "The student wanders around the classroom aimlessly to avoid doing their work." However, the teacher cannot know that the wandering is "aimless" or done with the intention of "avoiding work." Instead, the team should define an objective and measurable behavior, such as the one Anthony's team identified: "During content-area instruction, Anthony walks around the classroom for 10-minute intervals." The behavior is clearly identified as "walking around the room" and an estimated length of time for the behavior is provided (i.e., 10 minutes).

Next, contextual information about the target behavior must be discussed, including (a) time of day; (b) who is typically present; (c) what activities are occurring; (d) what the student has communicated about what they need, want, or feel; (e) what happened before school or earlier in the day; and (f) any other information the team may feel is relevant about the student. Preservice teachers need to understand how such information may inform their future data collection decisions. Supplemental Figure 1 provides examples of the contex-

tual information the team identified for Anthony, such as the behavior occurring during whole-group, lecture-based instruction and when peers and the general education teacher are present. Other relevant information includes the fact that no one has spoken to Anthony about his behavior yet and that he is meeting academic expectations. Because the behavior usually occurs during whole-group, lecture-based instruction, it would be beneficial for the team to collect data during those times.

Once the behavior has been defined and contextual information has been gathered, the team should determine roles for collecting additional data. Data collection should include a series of interviews, classroom observations, and a classroom inventory. During this stage, teachers should leverage each team members' expertise and experience. For example, if the special education teacher has more experience, knowledge, and availability to collect observational data in multiple classrooms, they may be the most appropriate team member for this role. However, if a preservice teacher has knowledge of data collection methods, they may take on that role with guidance. The general education teacher likely knows their own classroom better than other team members and therefore may guide the preservice teacher in conducting a classroom inventory. For Anthony's NIBS plan, Asha and Thomas split the data collection roles based on expertise. Asha plans to interview the student and collect qualitative and quantitative data. Thomas plans to interview the caregivers, current and previous teachers, and complete a classroom inventory.

Phase 2: Data Collection

Once the logistics have been discussed and data collection roles are assigned, the team begins to collect the data. The first step in data collection should be to interview the student. When interviewing the student, the teacher should consider the student's mode of communication, including verbal communication in English or other languages, multimodal communication, vocalizations, and/or gestures. The interviewer should ask the student about the behavior, why they use the behavior, and how the behavior is helpful for them. For students who use other modes of communication (e.g., speech-to-text, picture cards, communication device), it may be beneficial to have a speech-language pathologist conduct or help facilitate the interview.

After interviewing the student, the next step of the data collection process involves conducting caregiver interviews, which should include questions about whether the behavior occurs in the home environment and, if it does, the functionality of the behavior in that setting. The team can also request information about the supports and strategies the family have found to be effective at home. For example, a caregiver may use antecedent- or consequence-based supports in the home setting, such as providing the student with warnings of upcoming changes or providing behavior-specific praise after their child completes a desired task. Knowing about these strategies can be beneficial in the classroom as well. Teachers should remember that caregivers are experts on their children and learning from them can clarify the best ways to support the student in a neuro-affirming way. Because preservice teachers often lack opportunities to engage with families, teacher educators might consider allowing them to practice through role playing, responding to scenarios in small- or whole-group discussions in class, or utilizing mixed-reality simulation programs like Mursion, if available.

The next step in data collection is interviewing current and previous teachers, as well as related service providers. During this process, teachers are invited to discuss the student's behavior, the strategies and supports used in the past, what typically occurs before the behavior, and what typically occurs after the behavior. This information can clarify what seems to trigger the behavior and what strategies are helpful. By interviewing previous teachers, preservice teachers can experience the collaborative process and gain additional information about their students. The team may also consider asking related service providers whether they see the behavior in their settings and seeking their ideas for additional supports and strategies. For example, if the student is engaging in a behavior because they are unable to communicate a specific need, a speech-language pathologist may be able to provide strategies to help teachers communicate more effectively with the student. Within a course, preservice teachers might be given opportunities to collaborate with a preservice speech language therapy program or to use case study scenarios to practice this step of the data collection process.

The next step in data collection is observing the student in the classroom. Based on information from Phase 1 and the various interviews, the team can decide which types of data need to be collected. Typical forms of data include general classroom observations with anecdotal notes, antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) data, and quantitative data. When conducting classroom observations with anecdotal notes, an observer records notes about the behaviors of other students and teachers in the room as well as environmental factors that may be contributing to the student's target behavior. When collecting ABC data, an observer notes what occurred prior to the behavior, the behavior itself, and what occurred after the behavior. To analyze ABC data, the observer reviews the antecedents to determine poten-

tial triggers and the consequences to determine what may be maintaining the behavior. For instance, if the observer notes that the antecedent to the behavior was entering the cafeteria, there could be a strong odor in the cafeteria that triggers the behavior. When analyzing the consequences, the observer may find that the student is frequently allowed to eat in another classroom after engaging in the target behavior. Based on this pattern, it is likely that the function of the behavior is escape or avoidance. This information is helpful because the team now knows *why* the student is engaging in the target behavior and can modify the routine to allow them to avoid the aversive cafeteria environment.

Finally, quantitative data on the behavior's frequency, duration, or latency (i.e., how long it takes for the behavior to begin) may be collected. To collect frequency data, an observer selects the time of day when the behavior is most likely to occur and counts the number of times the behavior occurs during the observation period. Alternatively, an observer may collect duration data when a behavior occurs for an extended period of time with a distinct start and end time. The observer can use a stopwatch to measure and record the length of time the behavior lasts. Finally, latency data is similar to duration data, except that the timing begins when the antecedent occurs and ends when the behavior begins.

The last step in Phase 2 is to complete a classroom inventory. Traditionally, observers conduct classroom inventories of the physical layout of a classroom, though it is also helpful to consider the sensory input in the classroom. The team member might take into consideration the lighting, sounds, smells, and other sensory information as they conduct the inventory. For students who are hypo- or hypersensitive to sensory stimuli, it is helpful to note anything in the environment that could contribute to or limit the student's functioning in the classroom.

Phase 3: Follow-up Meeting

Once the team has completed data collection, they reconvene to review and identify relevant information that may explain the behavior. The team should consider sensory needs, BIMS, or RSD (see Phase 2). For example, Anthony's team identifies that his wandering behavior is likely due to sensory needs, but there could be other reasons for the behavior (see Tables 1 and 2). Including the preservice teacher in this meeting is a great way to ensure they are reviewing these processes and possibilities for their own practice as well.

After reviewing the data, the team should consider whether the behavior is worth changing by asking themselves two questions:

1. Is the behavior physically or emotionally harmful to the student or their peers?
2. Is the behavior interfering with the student's academic performance?

In reference to these questions, the team should consider how neurotypical norms may be inhibiting their neurodivergent students' education. If the behavior does not cause physical or emotional harm (e.g., hitting, name calling) to the student or their peers, and/or does not impact the student's academic performance, intervention would be inappropriate. Instead, the team should consider how to create an inclusive learning environment where different ways of learning and interacting are welcomed. If, however, the behavior is mentally or physically harmful to the student or their peers or interferes with the student's academic performance, the team should continue to develop a plan to support the student. Changing environmental factors, identifying proactive strategies to prevent the behavior from occurring, and addressing teacher behaviors and responses may better support the student (see Table 2 for a list of potential strategies).

Once the team has options for a plan, they can work with the student to identify which strategies would be best to implement in the classroom. The team should identify and present the student with three options for environmental changes and three options for proactive strategies, with the student choosing one to three of these for implementation. If the student recommends additional strategies, the team should consider how they might be implemented in the classroom as well. It may also be appropriate to establish behavioral goals in collaboration with the student. For example, if the student is engaging in wandering behavior like Anthony and the behavior is impeding learning, it may be beneficial to establish a goal to reduce the amount of time spent wandering the classroom. In Anthony's case, the team determined that, despite his teacher's concerns, his wandering was not impacting him academically, nor was it causing physical or emotional harm to himself or his peers. Although intervention was deemed unnecessary, the team provided options for both environmental changes (i.e., use of a wiggle seat, choice of seating, shortened lecture) and proactive strategies for additional support in class (i.e., seating options, use of sensory items, sensory breaks during lectures). Anthony chose the use of a wiggle seat, seating options, and sensory breaks during lectures.

Phase 4: Implement the Plan

The final phase of the NIBS plan is implementation. During this stage, the team collects progress monitoring data to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. The form of data collection should be determined based on the tar-

get behavior and in alignment with the data collection method from Phase 2. In Anthony's case, both frequency and duration data were collected, so Thomas continues to collect those forms of data during implementation. After a four-to-six-week period, the team, student, and family will hold a conference to review data and discuss how the strategies are working. If significant adjustments are needed, the team can revisit Phase 3 to redevelop the plan. If only minor adjustments are needed, those adjustments can be made and trialed for another four to six weeks. If the strategies appear to be successful, those strategies can be made permanent for the student. When Anthony, his caregivers, and the school-based team meet to discuss his plan and data, Thomas discusses the decreasing trend in wandering behavior based on progress monitoring data. Anthony also indicates that he preferred the supports provided in the plan. Therefore, the team decides to make the new supports a permanent change in his educational programming.

After completing the NIBS plan, Thomas shares that he has a better understanding as to why Anthony engages in wandering behavior. Although Anthony was wandering around the room while Thomas was teaching, he now realizes that Anthony was paying attention to instruction and the behavior was not interfering with his learning or the learning of his peers. Thomas feels this plan is something he would like to try with other students as he goes into his student teaching placement next semester. He and his classmates express more confidence in their ability to support neurodivergent students and better understand that is normal for people's behaviors, including their own, to differ.

Other Considerations

The NIBS plan aligns closely with the traditional FBA/BIP with the inclusion of families and neurodivergent students. As higher education faculty seek ways to incorporate the NIBS plan into existing FBA/BIP assignments, they might consider having their students work with peers to create both an FBA/BIP and a NIBS plan, choose one plan or the other to develop, or choose the plan they feel will be most appropriate based on the needs of their student. Depending on when behavior is discussed within the teacher education program, preservice teachers' access to students to practice this plan will vary. In cases where preservice teachers do not have access to a classroom, they might instead practice components using case studies and/or videos available from YouTube or highleveragepractices.org. Having preservice special education teachers partner with students enrolled in other professional preparation programs (e.g., general education, related service) can also help facilitate their practice.

CONCLUSION

Neurodivergent individuals make up almost one-fifth of the population, and every classroom in the United States is likely to have at least one student who is considered neurodivergent. It is important that preservice teachers understand how to respond to the behavioral messages their students communicate. Providing a broader range of knowledge about the neurodivergent experience and how it can inform behavioral support can help prepare preservice teachers to work in neurodiverse environments. Teacher educators must ensure their preservice teachers learn ways to evaluate behavior and its causes so that they can create classroom environments and implement supports conducive to the neurotype of each student in the class. This requires that preservice teachers view each student through a lens of respect, inclusivity, and presumption of competence.

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

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ABSTRACT

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

KEYWORDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the surface, the intention to not cause discomfort may seem like a desirable or expected individualized choice to maintain peace. In actuality, it reflects *socialized niceness* (Castagno, 2019; DiAngelo, 2021; Galman et al., 2010; Galman, 2019; Liera, 2020; Wegert & Charles, 2019). This is a patterned response that upholds detrimental "status quo" practices, allowing inequities to go unchecked and inadvertently maintaining the systems, pedagogies, and/or interactions that are problematic. Yet, despite the frequency with which special educators and children with disabilities experience exclusionary practices and barriers to access, and despite the ways that socialized niceness upholds these practices when teachers attempt to address them, there is limited readiness amongst special education teachers to advocate in ways that are most effective for their students (Burke et al., 2016; Weisling & Toson, in press).

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

1. W*hat* socialized niceness is,
2. *How* and *why* it manifests in their daily lives, and
3. How to productively navigate through socialized niceness in the name of ensuring all students have positive, engaged, and meaningful experiences in and out of the classroom.

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

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

POSITIONING OF SOLUTION IN EVIDENCE

Socialized Niceness

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

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

TABLE 1: Characteristics of Socialized Niceness

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

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

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

It is important to note that when teachers act in ableist, racist, imperialistic, cis-hetero-patriarchy, etc., ways, their behaviors are often the result of their years of socialization and the unexamined biases they carry. If asked, they would likely be adamant that they work for *all* students, even when their actions demonstrate exclusionary behavior and deficit thinking. Further, in these moments, when we choose to resist socialized niceness in order to address inequities that are often internalized, this does not inherently require us or give us the latitude to be disrespectful or inauthentic to ourselves. We are not "calling out" people or actions. Instead, we are "calling them in" (see, for example, Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In - Office of the Vice Provost for Institutional Inclusive Excellence) to discuss and learn from instances of inequity and injustice without judgment, but from a deep desire for a more just and equitable future.

PBTE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• Niceness	• Ableism
• Whiteness	• Classism
• Culture	• Racism
• Socialization	• Microaggression
• Ideology	• Prejudice
• Privilege	• Discrimination
• Intersectionality	• Marginalized
• Heteronormativity	• Implicit Bias
• Patriarchy	

APPLICATION

Getting Started: Build a Shared Language to Center Equity and Inform Analysis

Paramount to the successful employment of PBTE in building TCs' toolkits for disrupting socialized niceness is establishing a shared understanding of some of the key related vocabulary and concepts. While there are many potentially relevant terms, we recommend selecting those that are most relevant to TCs' contexts (e.g., current coursework, field experiences, future teaching placements based on license, etc.). Table 2 reflects several important terms.

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

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

Initial Equity-Centered Representation & Decompositions

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scenario 1 – Positive-Model Representation and Decomposition.

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

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

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

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

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

You: I hear your concern, and that's exactly why co-planning is essential. Together, we can design lessons that meet everyone's needs, using strategies like small group rotations or scaffolded materials. It doesn't have to be all on you or me.

Ms. Brown: I get that, but my schedule is packed. Can't you just handle their needs separately?

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

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

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

Decomposition. Annotate & Reflect:

Annotate:

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

Question for reflection:

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

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

Empowering TC's to Disrupt Niceness and Bias Through PBTE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scenario 2 – Representation, Decomposition, and Approximation.

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

You call for a meeting with Ms. Brown to address this directly. Here is how it proceeds:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You (quietly): Okay, sounds good.

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

Decomposition. Annotation and guided reflection support integrated learning.

Annotate:

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Center the students' experiences and impact. For example, in the scenarios above, co-teaching is, among other things, meant to reduce the adult-to-student ratio and maximize the impacts of diverse expertise, which can make a positive impact on students.
- Center students' humanity and dignity. They *deserve* respect, access, and support.
- Interject and reframe immediately if ableist, racist, or other inequitable language or ideas emerge. Use clarifying and probative prompts as appropriate:
  - "Can we pause for a moment? I want to be sure I understand what you mean when you say___."
  - "Is there another way we could look at ___?"
  - "When I hear you say___, I understand that to mean___. Is that what you meant?"
- Empower TCs to recognize and name their expertise in those shared spaces/interactions. Special educators, too, are experts in their craft and have strategies, ideas, and tools to offer that will benefit *all* learners and the teacher whose workload you would be sharing.
- Outline the specific reasons why the practice or behavior in question is problematic (legal, moral, logistical) and advocate for legal and moral responsibilities. For example, in the scenario above: "My students have legally protected services that I am required by law to provide. Further, they deserve to have consistent specialized instruction in their least restrictive environment. I cannot pull them out into small groups. But I can work with you to better understand how I can support them and you in our shared classroom space. When can you meet?"
  - Encourage TCs to research as needed to feel confident in their expertise. Two recommended resources to start: subscribing to weekly updates from the Office of Special Education Programs (https://sites.ed.gov/idea/newsletters/) or websites like *Wrightslaw* (https://www.wrightslaw.com/).
  - As needed, encourage TCs to give themselves time to calm down, follow up, and research: "I need 24 hours to think on this. I will follow up with you tomorrow."

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

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

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

Generative AI to Create Scenarios: Possibilities and Perils

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

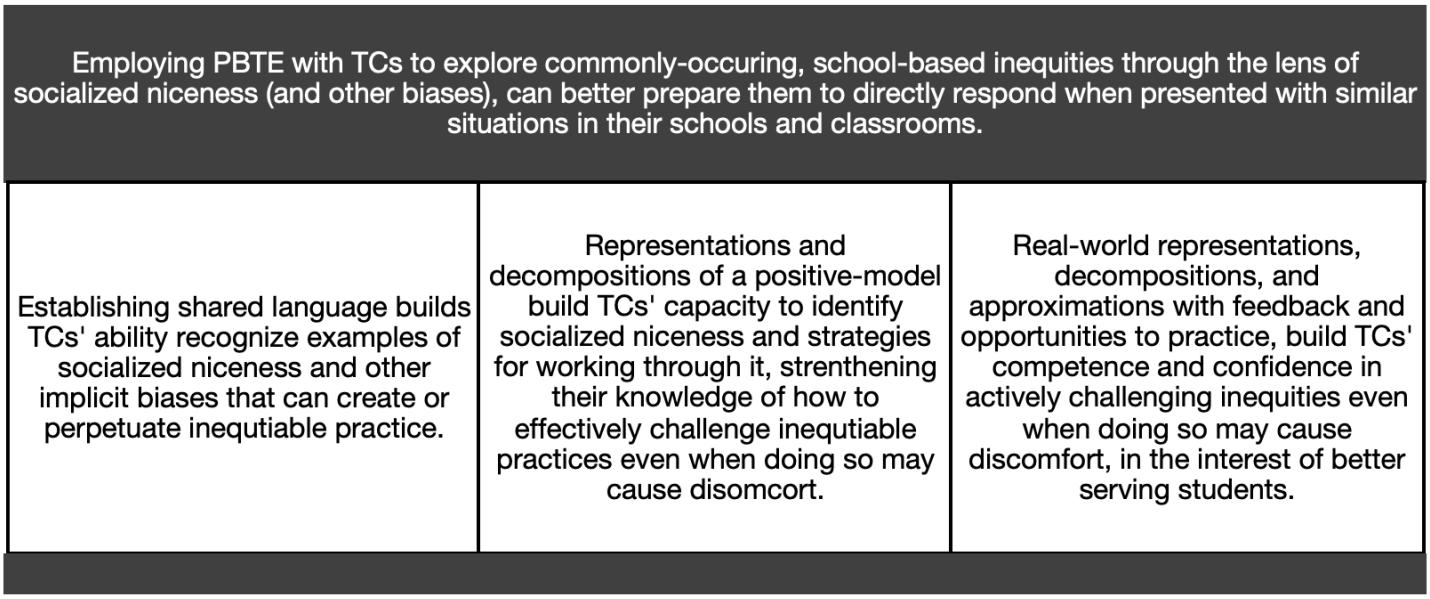
GenAI possibilities:

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

TABLE 4: Suggested Ideas for Additional Representation-Development

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

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



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

GenAI perils:

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Digital High Five: Virtual Co-Teaching Strategies within Teacher Residency Programs

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ABSTRACT

As an increasing number of teacher education programs are adopting teacher residency models in preparing future teacher candidates to meet the needs of local partnering school districts, coursework in teacher preparation is likely to include co-taught models of instruction where representatives from both local school districts and university-based teacher preparation programs will be conducted within shared virtual instructional settings. In addition, due to the physical distance that may stem from institutes of higher education (IHE) in comparison to localized school districts, virtual instructional settings are increasing necessary. It is the purpose of this practitioner-based article to provide teacher educators with a step-by-step guide to co-teaching within synchronous (live) classroom settings.

KEYWORDS

Co-teaching, teacher education, teacher residency programs, virtual or synchronous instruction

Qin and Juana represent a local teacher residency program, an established partnership between a local school district and teacher preparation program in the field of special education. As a result, Qin and Juana collaborate together and co-teach a fully online (live, synchronous) course preparing current future teacher candidates (i.e., resident candidates) to teach in a high needs area within the partnering local school district. As co-instructors of record, it is their continued goal to incorporate current co-teaching practices into their co-taught courses and to effectively model co-teaching strategies to best prepare the future resident candidates for inclusive, high needs classroom settings. As an increasing number of teacher education programs are adopting teacher residency models (Guha et al., 2017; Hope et al., 2022), it is the purpose of this article to provide practitioners with a step-by-step guide to co-teaching within synchronous classroom settings based on current best-practices in co-teaching applied within virtual teacher education settings.

What is a Teacher Residency Program?

A teacher residency program is a partnership between a university-based teacher education program and a local school district in both the recruitment and preparation of future teacher candidates, i.e., "resident" candidates. Residency programs in the field of education are based on the medical model of apprenticeship where the resident works directly with an expert teacher for the duration of an entire school year. Resident candidates are often provided a stipend for living expenses and tuition reimbursement, and in turn, the resident candidate agrees to train and work in a high needs classroom within the local school district for a set amount of time after completing their residency program (Guha et al., 2017). Residency programs are a unique model of teacher education, where a teacher preparation

program (i.e., a school or college for the training of teachers) and a local school district partner to prepare future resident candidates to support teacher retention within the school district. In addition, because institutes of higher education (IHE), in comparison to localized school districts, are often physically located far from one another, virtual instructional settings are increasingly necessary. In a teacher residency model, professional development opportunities are provided by the local school district, and representatives from both the district and institution of higher education are often assigned to co-teach teacher preparation coursework (Guha et al., 2017).

Co-Teaching: Cooperation vs. Collaboration

Co-teaching is a unique form of instruction where two or more instructors (e.g., university-based instructors, representatives from local school districts, additional professionals in the field of education, etc.) work together to teach a course or class to prepare future teacher candidates (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012; Rabin 2020). The concept of co-teaching is commonly associated as a model of inclusion in the field of special education, where a general education teacher with knowledge in specific areas of content, works together with a special education teacher providing support and special education services within a general education classroom setting (Cook & Friend, 1995). However, models of co-teaching are also common outside of special education and have also been applied to various instructional settings within higher education coursework as well (Bacharach et al., 2007; Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Salifu 2021).

Co-teaching can be defined as joint delivery of instruction to a diverse group of students within a shared classroom space (Cook & Friend, 1995; Pratt et al., 2017; Rabin 2020). Each teacher has their individual experiences and possesses their own toolbox of strategies that they are able to share with students. As a result, the inclusion of two teachers better diversifies and reinforces the content being presented (Nguyen & Ng, 2020; Strieker et. al., 2020). By incorporating co-teaching opportunities within a teacher residency program, teacher educators can specifically prepare teacher residents for working alongside both their assigned mentor teachers during their residency, as well as future colleagues in inclusive classroom settings.

In order to facilitate an effective co-teaching model, a collaborative relationship is imperative to ensure productive, efficient, and meaningful instruction when co-teaching can have a significant effect on the overall level of instruction provided within the academic setting (Brown et al., 2013; Cannady et al., 2021). Collaborative partnerships are marked by shared values and goals for the course. Instructors who are collaborative also expect open and honest communication regarding the strengths and weaknesses of each individual with regard to their shared impact on instruction (Rabin, 2020).

Step 1: Introductions and Setting Up the University-Based Course

To maintain a collaborative relationship in co-teaching, both instructors need to share their teaching philosophies and beliefs regarding instructor roles and student accountability (Cannady et al., 2021; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Salifu, 2021). In addition, in an online (i.e., virtual) classroom setting, instructors need to first understand one another's classroom routines during online instruction such as how they structure and organize their classes as well as student behaviors they consider to be acceptable or unacceptable in classes provided synchronously online (Rooks et al., 2022). A university-based course includes any required class (i.e., required by accredited standards) including coursework and practicum (i.e., student teaching placements).

Prior to the first day of instruction, both instructors should plan to meet virtually to review the course syllabus and plan out the sequence of the course. With the addition of a shared document online, both instructors have the ability to view a working document while making collaborative changes to documents such as slide presentations, course syllabi, and assignment rubrics. Reviewing prior examples of the syllabus and teacher preparation standards serves as a guide in determining the sequence of the course and an overview of class assignments.

When creating the course sequence, first determine who is comfortable taking the lead during each class session based on instructor experience and topic preference. In addition, create and complete a survey of instructional preferences to determine strengths and areas of need within the various virtual instructional settings (see Table 1). Review the syllabus and decide who will be responsible for the components listed in each section. This initial planning session serves as a blueprint so that both instructors have a better understanding of the course map and sequence of the class as well as supporting individual instructors in managing personal preparation time.

Tip: Create/Organize a Virtual Shared Drive

- Create an online shared drive so both instructors have access to all lecture presentations and materials (e.g., tests, slides, supplemental readings, etc.).
- Set up a folder for each class module and organize each folder so that both instructors can easily access and add to class materials for each session.
- Share information with the co-teacher regarding comfort level of topics and presentation styles. For example, one instructor may be more comfortable utilizing direct classwide instruction strat-

TABLE 1: Co-Teaching Survey to Establish a Collaborative Co-Teaching Relationship

Questions	
What is your level of comfort with technology?	Not comfortable at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very comfortable
In your opinion, how should the responsibilities of grading student work be divided?	Answer: _____
What is your preferred instruction style? (choose all that apply)	◯ Lecture ◯ Lecture with Discussion ◯ Lecture with Student Led Breakout Rooms
What is your preferred co-teaching style? (circle all that apply)	Team Teaching; Parallel Teaching; Station teaching (small group); One-Teach/One-Observe; One-Teach/One-Assist; Alternative Teaching
What are your biggest concerns with co-teaching?	Answer: _____
What is your preferred time to plan/collaborate regarding this course?	◯ AM ◯ PM
What is your preferred day to plan/collaborate regarding this course?	Monday ◯ Tuesday ◯ Wednesday ◯ Thursday ◯ Friday ◯
What is your preferred communication style?	Email ◯ Text Message ◯ Phone Call ◯ Video Call ◯
Select the course topics that that you are interested in class discussions and activities (choose all that apply)	Topic 1 ◯ Topic 2 ◯ Topic 3 ◯ Topic 4 ◯ Topic 5 ◯

egies, while a second instructor prefers facilitating small group activities. One of the strengths of co-teaching is the ability for the resident/candidates to see more than one teaching style modeled (Cook & Friend, 1995; Matsko et. al., 2020).

Step 2. Planning Out Each Lesson/Course Session

After beginning/establishing a collaborative co-teaching relationship, plan a time to meet together to prepare for each upcoming session. During each session determine who will take the lead on planned lectures, during in-class discussions, and in the development of presentation slides (Pratt et al., 2017; Cannady et al., 2021; Salifu, 2021). During the planning session, determine who will serve as the session facilitator (i.e., host). Review the syllabus for the upcoming session and determine the components that should be included within planned class discussions. If creating a new presentation, discuss the components that should be included and determine who will create individual presentation slides. Discuss any possible in-class activities and decide who will facilitate activity assignments during the planned lesson. To support the engagement and various learning modalities of students, there are several evidence-based instructional strategies that can be easily incorporated into virtual lessons and modeled for use in resident placements. Several resources have been developed to help teachers and instructors at all levels to identify and implement these practices including,

TABLE 2: Examples of Evidence-Based Practices to incorporate within Co-Taught Virtual Settings

NAME OF STRATEGY	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
Antecedent-Based Instruction	A modification of the environment to increase academic engagement	Provide (show) a slide describing what will be covered during the session and at what time. Let students know when breaks will be provided. Notify students when they will be asked to turn on cameras during the session.
Interest Inventory	Assessment/test to determine an individual's preferences and learning style	Access the learning strengths, weaknesses, and concerns in the classroom. Assign inventories for students to take to guide instruction and response styles used during synchronous sessions.
Prompting	Oral and visual cues to increase student engagement	Provide oral and visual prompts to students. Ensure students are able to interact with the prompts given and allow wait time for responses.
Prompting / Opportunities to respond	Verbal or sent text in the chat to increase/support student responses	While one instructor is leading a class discussion, the other prompts students in a chat section. Instructors give opportunities for students to respond to a poll.
Opportunities for Choice making	Instructors provide students with choices either verbally or through the use of virtual polling	In-class activities: Provide multiple opportunities for students to express/ demonstrate understanding (video, text response, etc.)
Reinforcement	Instructors (and peers) provide positive encouragement for student answers and engagement	Provide reactions (clapping, thumbs up, etc.) Instructors take turns reading questions in a chat section and providing positive feedback.
Visual Supports	Visual cues to aid in communication/ instruction	Instructors upload visual schedules, graphic organizers, assignment rubrics onto course page/site.

but not limited to: the Evidence-Based Intervention Network (https://ebi.missouri.edu/), the IRIS Center (https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu), and the What Works Clearinghouse (https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/). See Table 2 for examples of EBPs that can be applied to synchronous online lessons.

Before a particular session on the development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process, Juana and Qin review their calendars and set up a time during the week to meet virtually and plan for the upcoming course session. Because Qin, representing the partnering school district, has more extensive knowledge of the IEP process that pertains specifically to the district, she volunteers to take the lead on this particular class session and in the navigation and organization of materials they will present to the resident candidates. During this planning session, both instructors determine the topics to be discussed in class and divide responsibilities in creating slides on a shared presentation document. In their shared drive, Qin and Juana create a file for each class session. Within each file, the instructors include the lecture presentation and supplemental course materials. In this particular class session, Qin includes a graphic organizer to help guide students through the IEP process and plans for students to submit a copy of the completed graphic organizer at the end of the class session.

Tip: Planning for Instruction

• Label the assigned materials in the online shared online drive that each instructor will be responsible for to ensure smooth transitions from section to section.

• Be open about topics of which you are passionate. This enthusiasm will be evident in the instruction that is delivered.

• Determine comfort level with technology being used and prepare ahead of time for technical supports that may be needed for each instructor.

• Mutually create success criteria for each learning session to be reviewed at the end of the session.

Step 3. Co-Teaching the Class Session (Synchronous Online Instructional Delivery)

There are various instructional styles that can be incorporated when co-teaching a course online. For example, in a self-paced (i.e., asynchronous instruction-

al model), students log on to an enrolled course at their own preferred time, independent of the instructor. Instructors may decide to upload a lecture and provide directions in completing a session (i.e., module). Working at their own pace, students complete the module on their own or in a small group. In contrast, in-person modules (i.e., synchronous instruction) is more like a traditional course in that all students and instructors are present at the same time via a video communication platform. Using a synchronous model of instruction allows instructors to project or "share" a presentation on the student's screen devices and, depending on the selected video communication platform, video and audio options allow for student interactions with instructors and peers. In addition, additional user functions such as a chat box, a class poll, or signals indicating a "raised hand" or "question" allow for additional opportunities for students to engage or respond. Often, students have very specific questions regarding individual situations they have encountered and how it may apply to aspects of their assignments. A synchronous, co-taught session, also allows for the reinforcement of instructional content and for more student questions to be addressed throughout the class session.

Co-Teaching Models Applied in the Virtual Classroom Platform

Building on previously established models of co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995), the following instructional teaching models can also be adapted and applied within virtual, synchronous settings (see Table 3). There are several models of co-teaching that can be used to support student learning in the shared online classroom space. For a more in-depth description of these modules in their original form, the authors recommend the work of Friend et al., (1993), Cook and Friend (1995) and Friend and Bursuck (2018). During the lesson, plan specifically to utilize the various co-teaching models and determine the specific roles and responsibilities that each instructor will be responsible for.

Team Teaching

In a team-teaching approach, both instructors present material together (Chizhick & Brandon, 2020; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995, Simons et. al., 2020). During the virtual class session, both instructors introduce session concepts at the same time and facilitate class discussions within a whole group. One instructor may choose to take on the role of host or both instructors may decide to take turns sharing materials throughout the lesson (Chizhick & Brandon, 2020).

Parallel Teaching

A parallel teaching model (Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Simons et. al., 2020) allows two or more instructors to split the shared virtual classroom into two smaller (e.g., breakout groups). Individual students are invited to join a smaller (i.e., private) class group and instructors provide direct instruction within the smaller group setting. Instructors may choose to provide similar lessons within each group or cover different topics altogether. One benefit to utilizing individual instructors to teach small groups is lower student-to-teacher ratios and increased student opportunities to respond to material (Simons et. al., 2020).

Station Teaching/Small Groups

One particular benefit to the virtual classroom platform is the availability to separate the class into small groups. Similar to cooperative learning groups (Agonafir, 2023; Herrera-Pavo, 2021; Kamps et al., 1995), instructors can create small groups within the virtual class to allow students to complete activities and assignments together. Instructors in this model can choose to work directly with individual groups or roam from one group to the next in order to check in and provide feedback (Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995).

Alternative Teaching

Using the virtual classroom platform, an alternative teaching model allows for one instructor to provide instruction while another instructor meets with individual students or small groups of students in small groups (e.g., "breakout rooms"; Beninghof, 2020; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Simons et. al., 2020).

One-Teach/One-Assist

Similar to the one-teach/one-observe model, the one-teach/one-assist approach also designates one instructor as the lead while another instructor prompts student responses in the chat or discussion, reinforces presented concepts introduced by the lead instructor, and provides additional opportunities for students to respond to presented materials (Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Murawski, 2009; Pugach & Johnson, 1995).

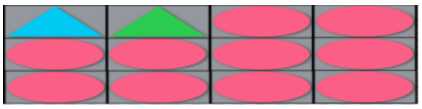
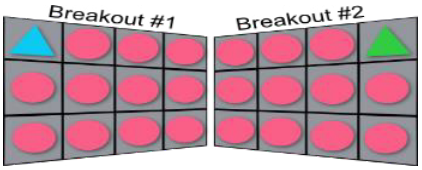
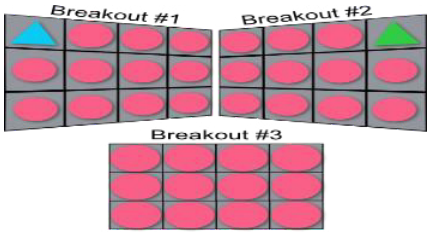
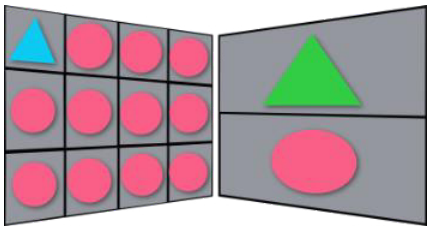
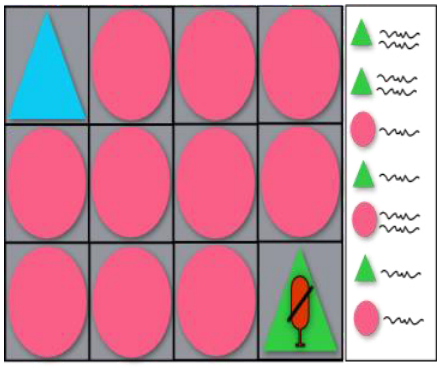
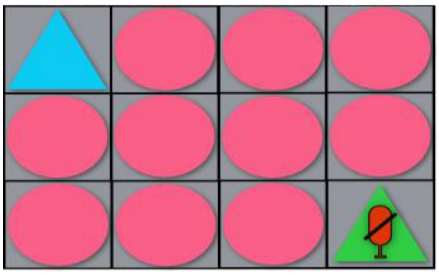
One-Teach/One-Observe

In the large group virtual classroom space, both instructors are present. Utilizing the One-Teach/One-Observe Model of co-teaching (Beninghof, 2020; Friend & Bursuck, 2018; Brown et al., 2013) within the virtual classroom space involves one instructor taking the lead during whole class instruction while another instructor monitors student engagement.

Tip: Co-teaching Strategies in Synchronous Online Formats

• During synchronous class lectures and discussions, utilize closed captioning options within the virtual platform for accessibility and various student

TABLE 3: Teaching Strategies Applied to Virtual (Synchronous) Classroom Settings

Co-teaching Strategy	Definition/Description	Examples/Visual pictures
1. Team teaching	Both instructors teach simultaneously. Instructors take turns lecturing and adding to class discussions.	
2. Parallel Teaching	Using the group function in the selected communication platform, the class is divided into two groups. Each instructor joins a group and provides individual instruction.	
3. Station Teaching/Small Group Settings	Using the group function in the selected communication platform, the class is divided into several (e.g., 4-6 groups or "stations"). Instructors rotate or "join" each station to instruct, check for understanding and provide feedback.	
4. Alternative Teaching	Using a predetermined schedule, each instructor will teach at a designated time while the other instructor gathers data, completes course paperwork, or follows-up with individual student needs based on work samples in a different location.	
5. One Teach / One Assist	One instructor takes the lead in lecturing or facilitating a class discussion. The second instructor checks in with students via chat and gathers data regarding the previously agreed upon success criteria for the lesson. The second instructor also creates and facilitates creation of breakout rooms and ensures multi-media platforms are cued for seamless transitions between topics and activities.	
6. One Teach / One Observe	One teacher will designate (formally or informally) themselves as the lead instructor during the class session. The other instructor may participate in the class learning and view the content from the perspective of the students. During breakout rooms, join the room without moderating the discussion.	

Note. Adapted from: Cook & Friend (1995) and Friend & Bursuck (2018).

TABLE 4: Debriefing Fidelity Checklist

QUESTION	EXAMPLES/CONSIDERATIONS	YES/NO	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Were students engaged?	*Were video screens off? Did we check for understanding? Did we use exit strategies?*	Yes/No	
Did the students meet the success criteria for the day?	*Did students receive credit for the lesson? Were students able to demonstrate learning?*	Yes/No	
Were students given opportunities to respond throughout the lesson?	*Were students active in class discussions? Did students participate via chat or by classwide discussion?*	Yes/No	
Did students demonstrate a grasp of the objectives presented in class?	*Were students able to discuss presented concepts with the class or in small groups? Were students able to practice the concepts presented independently or in small groups? Were students assessed during the class for understanding of material?*	Yes/No	
Did I (we) embed enough time for students to complete tasks?	*Were students given enough time? Was more time needed for students to practice and complete tasks?*	Yes/No	
Did I (we) provide enough breaks and at the right time?	*Did students request a break during class? Did I (we) check-in to see if students were in need of a break?*	Yes/No	

learning modalities.

• Determine if lessons should be recorded for student viewing at a later time.

• Plan for co-teaching strategies of instruction (e.g., one-teach/one-assist and observe, station teaching, etc.).

During planning sessions, Qin and Juana divide upcoming lessons into three distinct sections and incorporate three different co-teaching models: one-teach/one assist and observe, parallel teaching, and team teaching. Because Qin is more comfortable with the instructional material and local school district policies, she volunteers to begin (i.e., host) the lesson and takes the lead in providing direct instruction. As the lead instructor during this lesson, she shares her screen and projects the co-created presentation and additional materials within the digital video platform. While Qin is providing direct instruction to the class, Juana utilizes the discussion board to answer student questions, prompt individual students, and provide additional opportunities for students to respond. After Qin provides direct instruction to the class, both instructors utilize the small group function to split the class into two smaller groups with each instructor joining a different group (i.e., parallel teaching). During this part of the lesson, the instructors guide the smaller group through an activity they designed to practice engaging in the material from earlier in the large class. After students complete the in-class activity, instructors bring the class back together and utilize team teaching model to facilitate a follow-up, in-class discussion and to take turns reinforcing the resident candidate's learning by responding to questions and checking for understanding of the presented lesson concepts.

Step 4. Debrief, Review, and Provide Feedback: What Went Well, What Could Be Better, What to Do Next Time

At the end of each session, either immediately or at a set time before the next session, plan to meet to discuss the lesson including what went well, and identify areas for improvement. Examples of questions to ask may include: Were the students engaged in the discussion? Did students engage with the provided materials? How much of the information needs to be revisited? How do instructors know that the information presented was retained? (See Table 4). During the debriefing meeting, reflect on the strategies that were successful and reinforcing student success as well as brainstorm additional strategies to support the class and individual learners in future class sessions. Be honest and open about the session to make informed decisions about future lessons. For example, were some individual students engaging more than others? Did you notice individual students/groups rushing through materials? Together brainstorm strategies that may support the success of the upcoming lesson and troubleshoot any potential dilemmas to best ensure instructional success as

co-teachers (see Table 5).

At the end of the day's session, Qin and Juana remain on the video platform for 15 minutes to debrief the lesson. Overall, both Qin and Juana feel pleased with the level of discussion and commented responses from the resident candidates in the online chat function. They feel that the pacing of the lesson was strong and, in particular, Qin's use of redirection strategies to keep the class discussion relevant and on topic. However, Qin also noticed that some students seemed disengaged during the group activity when assigned to small group break-out rooms within the video platform. During their debrief, Qin and Juana discuss the possibility of assigning individual roles within each breakout group. Juana suggests that a list of roles be created for individual group members moving forward. During this time, the instructors also review the group submitted in-class activity. The instructors divide the assigned group submissions to better provide feedback together. Qin and Juana then review the syllabus and discuss the next session on IEP goals and benchmarks. The instructors decide that Juana will take the lead on introducing the material and Qin volunteers to set up the activity. In reviewing the syllabus and assigned readings before class, both Qin and Juana determine the topics to include in the upcoming lesson. Juana sets up a shared presentation in the drive, and the instructors determine which slides they will cover and create individually before the next class session.

TABLE 5: Troubleshooting Guide for Instructors

DILEMMA	STRATEGIES
1. You and your co-teacher don't feel like you have enough time to meet and plan?	• Schedule meetings well in advance • Share access to work calendars
2. The flow of the presentation does not feel cohesive	• Mark each of the slides with the name of the presenter • Determine which co-teaching strategy would work for each presentation slide
3. The perspectives of each member are different?	• Find research to validate different perspectives when each are presented • Embrace differences of perspective and discuss different views in class discussions
4. Personalities do not mesh	• Take time to re-define roles and responsibilities by taking the co-teaching survey (see Table 1.)

CONCLUSION

Given the need for co-taught instruction in teacher preparation within teacher residency models, there are many options for online instructional formats. In a synchronous virtual classroom space, co-teaching allows for two or more perspectives to introduce concepts and reinforce learning through diverse perspectives. Incorporating the various models of co-teaching within virtual classroom spaces provide a unique form of structure that supports the development of teacher education in unique structures and settings. Co-teaching in residency programs provides a unique model of teacher education where institutions of higher education partner with local school districts to prepare future teacher candidates (i.e., residents) for working in high needs classrooms within local school districts. By partnering together, institutions of higher education and local school districts can further support developing needs in teacher education.

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

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ABSTRACT

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

KEYWORDS

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

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

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

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

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

SETPPs have not typically prepared special educators to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners or disrupt systems of exclusion related to multiple and intersecting identity markers (González et al., 2023; More et al., 2016). For example, studies have shown that SETCs tend to privilege dis/ability identity over other aspects of identity (Boveda & Aronson, 2019). SETCs are also better able to discuss dis/ability than various other identity markers or to articulate an intersectional lens in relation to their role as future educators. Further, Chu and Garcia (2014) reported survey results illustrating a relationship between teacher preparation that explicitly prepares special educators to work with culturally and linguistically diverse learners and special educators' reported self-efficacy for serving such students. Without intentional preparation, educators perpetuate educational inequities such as disproportionality. For instance, the disproportionate representation of multilingual learners and Students of Color in special education settings is well-documented (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Cioé-Peña, 2022a). Children of Color and students who have been marginalized due to their intersecting identities frequently encounter exclusion and are disciplined at disproportionate rates in school settings (Annamma et al., 2013). SETPPs are positioned to disrupt iniquitous teaching practices by critically evaluating their curricula, centering anti-oppressive practices, and attending to intersectionality.

What Is Intersectionality?

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

Why Do We Need Anti-Oppressive Educators?

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

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

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

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

How Can TPPs Develop Anti-Oppressive Educators?

TPPs have the potential to help TCs become anti-oppressive educators by developing critical perspectives and shifting TCs' beliefs about students, whether they are preparing to teach in general, special, or bilingual/English as a second language positions (Dunham & Alexander, 2022; Hancock et al., 2021; Vavrus, 2009). Engaging TCs in identity work and self-reflection to examine their own cultural and dis/ability identities is a critical feature of effective preparation (Li, 2013). When TCs are intentionally prepared to examine identity, they can become "cultural workers" capable of learning about their students' cultural practices and lived experiences and effectively integrating this knowledge into the classroom while understanding the broader socio-political context in which their students are situated (Li, 2013, p. 137). Developing critical perspectives and becoming "cultural workers" involves both identity work and cultivating deep pedagogical knowledge. TPPs and SETPPs are positioned to engage TCs in critical reflection and identity development through their selected curricula and placement experiences (McCray & Waitoller, 2023).

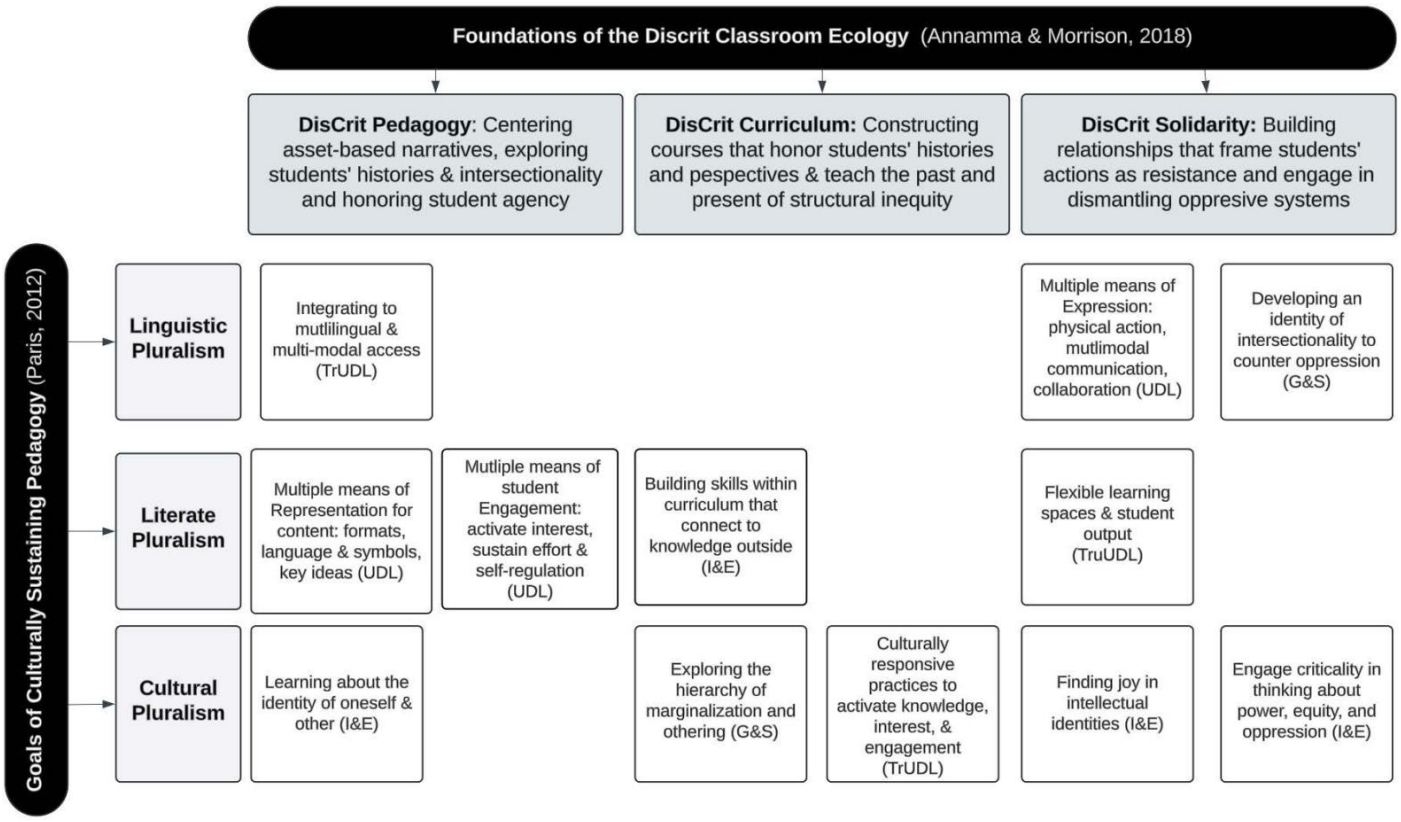
Many scholars have called for TPPs to prepare general and special educators to understand intersectionality and disrupt systems of oppression within schools (Annamma et al, 2013; Freire, 1970; Li, 2013; McCray & Waitoller, 2023). Other scholars have invoked TPPs to address a variety of identity markers, including gender identity (Blair & Deckman, 2019), heteronormativity and cisnormativity (McEntarfer, 2016), and increased attention to students who are immigrants and children of immigrants (Goodwin, 2017; Sattin-Bajaj et al., 2023). Within special education, scholars have encouraged SETPPs to question medical models of dis/ability and develop critical consciousness on the interdependent nature of ableism and racism within schools (Annamma et al., 2013; Perouse-Harvey, 2022). In response, SETPPs must prepare SETCs to broadly examine the ways in which systems of inequity are upheld and explore how these systems impact marginalized individuals in the interest of preparing SETCs to disrupt such inequities (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Cochran-Smith, 2023; Sobel et al., 2011). SETPPs may respond by offering programming that intentionally weaves social constructs, conceptual frameworks, and reflective exercises throughout coursework and teaching practica (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Hancock et al., 2021). As we prepare candidates to work collaboratively with general educators, SETPPs must also teach about differences in ways that equip special educators with the skills to work with diverse learners who have been multiply marginalized.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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

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

FIGURE 1: Conceptual Framework: Learning Environment and Pedagogy Matrix



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

Along the horizontal axis, we have positioned features of Annamma and Morrison's (2018) DisCrit Classroom Ecology, which has been proposed as a framework to resist deficit narratives pertaining to Students of Color who have been multiply marginalized. This is done by ensuring teachers know their students, teach with students' gifts in mind, which are unique to Children of Color who have been multiply marginalized, and view students' actions as forms of resistance. The DisCrit Classroom Ecology features three key domains (i.e., DisCrit Pedagogy, DisCrit Curriculum, and DisCrit Solidarity) that create a system of interactions between knowledge generation, relationships, and content that can be leveraged to disrupt oppression and reimagine education (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). DisCrit Pedagogy positions students as knowledge generators by highlighting students' abilities and reframing features of their identity as assets. DisCrit Curriculum explicitly addresses the history of inequity and injustice experienced by multiply marginalized individuals in our society and centers the achievements and intellectual contributions of Communities of Color. Lastly, DisCrit Solidarity highlights the importance of authentic relationships between students and educators. Educators act in solidarity by rejecting oppression and exclusion in favor of shared power and resistance with students (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). We arranged DisCrit Pedagogy, DisCrit Curriculum, and DisCrit Solidarity as key features of the anti-oppressive learning environment that can be addressed through teacher action.

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

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

Positionality

As recommended by Boveda and Annamma (2021), our intersectional identities and positionalities are woven throughout the manuscript in an attempt to expose our privilege and center the knowledge and perspectives of individuals and communities who have long been marginalized. Two of the authors identify as white, and another identifies as holding a mixed Latine-white identity. We are all native English speakers, with two authors speaking Spanish as a second language. Two authors identify as dis/abled and as parents to children receiving special education services. While we all consider ourselves allies and partners in solidarity, none of us identify as members of the LGBTQ+ or immigrant communities. Our experiences, perspectives, and intersectional identities as TEs drive our commitment to advance equity for all students while remaining engaged as learners in this area.

Support for Centering Justice in SETPP Coursework

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

Addressing Intersectionality in Teacher Education

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

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

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

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

Addressing Anti-Racist Teaching in Teacher Education

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

Scholarship in teacher education has begun to explore anti-racist teacher preparation. Anti-racist teaching disrupts and challenges racism by exposing how racism operates systemically and how it impacts People of Color in overt and less obvious ways (Affolter, 2019). Affolter (2019) draws on the work of King and Chandler (2016) to make a distinction between non-racist and anti-racist. While non-racist offers a passive way of distancing oneself from racists beliefs or acts, an anti-racist stance involves actively rejecting racism in all its manifestations at an institutional level (King & Chandler, 2016). Kishimoto (2018) emphasizes individual responsibility in dismantling racism and that anti-racist pedagogy should preclude individuals from perpetuating the institution of racism. To support TCs in taking responsibility and making sense of the ways in which racism operates, TEs can facilitate discussions about race and equity that encourage collective unpacking and allow for multiple perspectives, even when they become tense or uncomfortable for teachers or students (Picower, 2021). This work can be supported by explicitly centering race in coursework, leaving space for conflict to occur, and avoiding race evasion. These practices can be infused throughout courses and programs. For instance, Hancock et al. (2021) explained how intentional design in one program allowed them to effectively prepare TCs to meet licensure standards while simultaneously learning to implement anti-oppressive practices. They did so by applying DisCrit Classroom Ecology to fieldwork expectations for early childhood TCs. This scholarship suggests that TPPs, including SETPPs, have great potential to shape teachers' beliefs and practices to advance equity.

Addressing Anti-Ableist Teaching in Teacher Education

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

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

Anti-ableism also involves recognizing how ableism presents systemically and developing a repertoire of strategies for resistance. One form of resistance is to enact inclusion. Within TPPs that model and encourage inclusive practices, TCs have demonstrated increased use of practices that promote inclusion in their own teaching. One such TPP promoted inclusive pedagogies by centering identity and connecting theory and practice across their curriculum (Engelbrecht & Ekins, 2017). Collaborative learning across TPPs through coursework and creating opportunities for experiential learning in inclusive fieldwork settings can also provide SETCs with contexts for learning about diversity and ability (McCray & Waitoller, 2023). Baglieri and Lalvani (2020) further encourage expanding notions of normality, challenging oppressive views of dis/ability, and developing an understanding of how ableism operates. They define ableism as "the belief that being non-disabled, 'able-bodied,' or 'able-minded' is inherently better than having a dis/ability or impairment" (p. 71). Baglieri and Lalvani describe the importance of helping educators develop positive attitudes toward students with dis/abilities to disrupt the marginalization of dis/abled students. TCs should explore their own views of dis/ability and be prepared to help children engage in discussion of dis/ability. Children notice differences related to dis/ability and other identity markers and benefit from engaging in meaningful dialogue about these observations (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020). SETEs should provide examples of modeling anti-ableist language and discussing how dis/ability relates to core content. By embedding these opportunities, TCs can envision how they might apply these approaches in their future classrooms (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020).

DESIGNING SYLLABI TO CREATE ANTI-OPPRESSIVE COURSES

Centering anti-oppressive practices within TPPs requires a concerted effort among faculty at the program level (Goodwin, 2017; Sobel et al., 2011). However, in this paper, we emphasize the agency instructors have when designing their own courses and syllabi (Noguera & Alicea, 2021). This reflects an understanding that both institutions and individuals are responsible for enacting change to disrupt systems of oppression (Kishimoto, 2018). Conscious course design is essential to centering anti-oppressive practices. While course design includes many components, syllabi provide a foundation as the guiding document for each course, making them an important aspect of overall program design (Sobel et al., 2011). Syllabi indicate whose knowledge is privileged and reflect priorities within a course (Zidani, 2021). Effective courses integrate anti-oppressive content throughout the curriculum rather than simply highlighting certain identities or topics in a featured lesson (Hyland, 2010; Kishimoto, 2018). Syllabi that do not center anti-oppressive practices systematically (re)create and perpetuate systems of oppression through erasure and evasiveness (Gorski et al., 2013; Pugach et al., 2019). This erasure has been observed within TPPs relative to culture, race, language, immigration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and dis/ability (Goodwin, 2017; Gorski et al., 2013; More et al., 2016; Pugach et al., 2019). This absence of diversity in the curriculum is problematic. Prior works have recommended that TPPs (a) integrate social justice content across the curriculum, (b) model the use of inclusive and anti-oppressive practices, (c) engage TCs in ongoing identity work with an emphasis on intersectionality, and (d) support TCs in learning to recognize and disrupt systems of oppression when planning teacher preparation courses (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Dunham & Alexander, 2022; Kishimoto, 2018). Through careful development and design of course syllabi, SETEs can select and prepare content that addresses these recommendations consistently across programming.

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

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

MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: ENACTING RESISTANCE THROUGH REFLECTION

While anti-oppressive practices have been proposed, they often isolate aspects of identity (Hancock, 2007) and have not been widely adopted within SETPPs (González et al., 2023; More et al., 2016). As new and emerging scholars, we are committed to disrupting systems of exclusion and oppression in TPPs. As reviewed, many scholars have advocated for adopting lenses of intersectionality (e.g., Pugach et al., 2019) and a dynamic process for integrating anti-oppressive practices in TPPs (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017). Other scholars have begun to enact positive change through the development of educational resources for advancing social justice through tools like the Equity-Minded Syllabus Review sponsored by the University of Southern California or the Decolonize Your Syllabus checklist from Mercer University. Related scholarship in special education has presented a syllabus template that foregrounds UDL (Passman & Green, 2009) and considers intersectionality in co-teaching models (Boveda & Weinberg, 2020). Boveda and Weinberg (2020) developed the Intersectionally Conscious Collaboration (ICC) Protocol Teacher Education Version 1, a tool that supports SETEs in improving their classroom instruction by centering intersectionality. Acting as a complement to these instructional resources, our tool differs from these in that it is meant to support course and content (re)design by grounding course content and syllabi development in anti-oppressive pedagogy as it relates to SETPPs. We offer A Guided Reflection of Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework as an avenue to begin exploration into privilege, intersectionality, and institutional power in SETPPs. We acknowledge that we hold many privileges, but in naming and reflecting upon our identities and commitments to improving teacher preparation, we hope to disrupt systems of inequity in education through a lens that centers intersectionality for learners who have been labeled as dis/abled. With our tool, we aim to personally invite and encourage other SETEs to intentionally design courses with anti-oppressive practices at their core. Through our own experiences as students and instructors in SETPPs, we recognize that a practical tool guiding reflection can support SETEs in disrupting oppression through self-reflection, agency, and solidarity.

GUIDED REFLECTION TOOL

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

Key Aspects of Anti-Oppressive Course Design

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

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

Domain	Anchor Questions	Follow-up Prompts
IDENTITY	*How will I curate content that incorporates diverse identities, authors, and perspectives relative to key course objectives throughout the syllabus?*	• Where will I feature authors, presenters, and media that includes diversity in ability, gender, sexual orientation, language, race, religion, and social class? • Where will I center diverse perspectives and identities in connection to key course concepts? Am I able to select materials that highlight intersectionality? • Where will I include strategies for engaging in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy or supporting diverse learners?
	In what ways am I planning to learn about students' identities and perceptions of variability?	• How will I understand how my teacher candidates are reflecting upon their own identities and learning? How might I challenge their thinking as the course progresses? • How will I learn about my teacher candidates' accessibility needs and learning preferences? • How will I learn about my teacher candidates' initial perceptions of their students and course topics and concepts?
	Where will I create opportunities to include teacher candidates' multiple and intersecting identities within the curriculum?	• Where will I include opportunities for teacher candidates to draw upon their multiple and intersecting identities when submitting written or recorded assignments? • Where will I include opportunities for teacher candidates to draw upon their multiple and intersecting identities in discussion and group activities during class? • How will I cultivate a classroom community in which teacher candidates feel comfortable sharing and reflecting upon their own identities and experiences?
	How do my identity markers relate to my content and my learners, and how does that influence my teaching of key concepts	• How have I explored my own identity in relation to the content and teacher candidates that I teach? • What do I understand about my own identity in relation to the priorities I establish for learning? • What areas can I identify for further learning and how do I plan to continue this work?
POWER & PRIVILEGE	*How do power and privilege operate within this course?*	• Where will I explore the intersections of racism, ableism, heteronormativity, gender norms, and other forms of oppression within this course? • What steps have I taken to notice and effectively address microaggressions? How will I consider power and privilege moving forward?
	How am I considering institutional histories and the impacts of oppression related to course content?	• How will I proactively address harm caused by historical injustice, institutional histories, and microaggressions embedded in course content? • How will I name the harmful histories represented in my field or institution?
	What changes will I make to disrupt harmful narratives and dominant ideologies in course content?	• What agency do I have in modifying central themes and ideologies represented in the field? How will I enact this agency? • How might I be reifying and replicating dominant cultural norms? What will I do with this information?
	How do I anticipate my professional identity and power within my institution will influence my interactions with students?	• How have I reflected on my institutional role and how it is perceived by my teacher candidates? • How do I plan to continue this work? • How will I balance this in my teaching, communication, and relationships with teacher candidates? • Where will I seek input from students regarding course policies, procedures, and content to include student voice?
ACCESSIBILITY, EQUITY, & INSTRUCTION	*How will I design content and course activities with an anti-oppressive stance?*	• When can I engage in anti-oppressive practices? When have I previously missed opportunities? • Where can I include explicit examples and models of anti-oppressive curriculum?
	In what ways will I design instructional activities that center and sustain my students' intersectional identities?	• How will I honor teacher candidates' diverse ways of demonstrating knowledge and engagement? • How will I prepare instruction to facilitate culturally relevant ways of engaging in learning content?
	How will I prioritize equity and universal design in my own teaching practice?	• How have I prioritized equity and universal design in the past? Moving forward, how will I plan instruction that uses multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression? • To what extent are my planned grading policies aligned with anti-oppressive practices? • How will I attend to diverse and intersectional identity markers in course learning activities?
	What steps will I take to increase accessibility?	• How will I make lesson content and materials accessible? • How will I implement instructional technology to support students? How will I design flexible work products for submissions? • How will I gather and reflect on feedback from teacher candidates about my course accessibility?

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

Identity

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

Power and Privilege

By evaluating how power and privilege are represented in coursework, SETEs can explore the histories and injustices experienced by those who have been multiply marginalized and create opportunities for resistance and solidarity with their students (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). As a first step, SETEs should interrogate their own identities and power in relation to the course, syllabi, teaching assistants, and students (Boveda & Annamma, 2021; Hyland, 2010). This section offers SETEs the chance to consider their own agency in countering microaggressions in their courses, replicating dominant cultural norms in content, or teaching harmful histories without adequately addressing injustices. Likewise, SETEs can leverage these histories to provoke critical discussions of power, equity, and identity in education (Muhammad & Mosley, 2021).

Accessibility, Equity, and Instruction

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

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFLECTION

The Guided Reflection for Identity, Power, and Praxis in Coursework tool is intended to be a resource to support SETEs' efforts to engage in meaningful syllabus development. We reiterate that this tool is not a checklist or an exhaustive list of exploratory questions but rather an entry into equity and social justice work for SETEs reimagining teacher preparation. We encourage SETEs to approach syllabi and course design as an iterative process. SETEs may use this tool collaboratively across SETPPs or as a catalyst for professional development. SETEs might start by selecting one key aspect of the tool to focus on each semester or simply using the guided reflection to encourage their own identity development work. We also recommend that SETEs consider partnering with a colleague or affinity group to discuss reflections. By claiming our own agency as SETEs in curating teacher preparation coursework, we can adjust our own practices to move toward justice and equity in our SETPPs.

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

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Lessons Learned from an Interdisciplinary Approach to Educator Preparation

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the authors describe the benefits and challenges of an interdisciplinary preparation program involving students in special education and counseling graduate degree programs. Special Education teachers and related service personnel often lack 'shared knowledge, skills, and expertise' specific to the professional standards of each discipline (Quezada et al., 2021). Consequently, they tend to struggle when serving on school-based problem-solving teams faced with the challenge of planning, implementation, and monitoring of evidence-based practices (EBPs) for students with intensive disabilities and social emotional needs. One possible alternative to discrete discipline preparation programs is the possibilities of improving practice through interdisciplinary professional training models. Unlike traditional silo approaches to educator preparation, interdisciplinary preparation approaches provide opportunities for special education teachers and related service personnel to exchange expertise of discipline specific knowledge and skills through meaningful application in shared coursework and collaboration in clinical field experiences. In this article, we describe an example of an interdisciplinary preparation program titled, Intensive Needs Teacher and Counselor Training Program which originated in 2017. Lessons learned through implementation of our interdisciplinary preparation program suggest evidence of potential barriers and invaluable benefits to this unique approach to educator training, as well as recommendations for best practices are shared.

KEYWORDS

Applied behavior analysis, evidence-based practices, interdisciplinary preparation training, mental health, school counselors, and special education teachers

School problem-solving teams focusing on the provision of interventions for struggling students typically include special education teachers and other related service providers such as counselors, school psychologists, nurses, and/or social workers to name a few. These education professionals are traditionally among the first to respond when a K-12 student experiences significant disruptions to their learning and the learning of their peers. Special education teachers and related service providers are frequently asked to effectively collaborate with other professionals to identify and implement intensive evidence-based practices (EBPs) for students with the most challenging concerns (e.g., applied behavior analysis [ABA]).

For many K-12 schools, a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) involves problem-solving teams that provide early intensive interventions with the intent of accelerating student learning that has fallen below their peers. Conceptually, the ultimate desired outcome of MTSS is to avoid further development of serious learning challenges by a student (Friend & Cook, 2020). Essentially, MTSS is a comprehensive framework based on a tiered progression of intensive interventions applied based on specific needs of a student. One major drawback for MTSS teams is the lack of shared understanding among members. In most cases none of the professionals serv-

ing on the MTSS team have participated in interdisciplinary preparation training that prepares them to collaborate, and exchange discipline-specific knowledge, terminology, and skills (Olsen et al., 2016). Instead, many teacher preparation programs and training of related service professionals rarely include sufficient teaching of the required skills and application of interdisciplinary collaboration and group problem-solving required for effective participation in the identification and implementation of intensive EBPs for students with disabilities (e.g., ABA; Foxx & Anderson, 2020).

Discrepancy Between Preparation and Practice

Many children with disabilities who have highly intensive needs require the combined expertise of a variety of educators including but not limited to special education teachers, early interventionists, and related service professionals, working together to determine interventions and support for students with the greatest needs. Despite expectations that special education teachers and related service personnel collaborate and prescribe appropriate interventions for students with challenging needs, their diverse professional backgrounds and training make it challenging for them to collaborate due to their lack of shared information, understanding, and experience (Quezada et al., 2021; Smith, 2010). Several studies suggest that although special education teachers receive varying levels of preparation in functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP); (e.g., including but not limited to a full course on the topic, content integrated across multiple courses, selected course sessions on topic), their training specific to implementation of EBPs is insufficient in terms of determining how to apply these interventions with the most challenging students exhibiting intensive behavior, academic, and/or social-emotional concerns (e.g., Anello et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2019; Brownell et al., 2010; Evans et al., 2013; Flynn & Lo, 2016; Garland et al., 2013; Henderson et al., 2020; Mayton et al., 2010). Additionally, many special education teacher preparation programs do not provide on-going and meaningful clinical field experiences for candidates to learn and apply collaborative interactive teaming among professionals serving on interdisciplinary teams (e.g., school counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers; Anello et al., 2017).

Similarly, according to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2015), school-employed mental health professionals (i.e., counselors, psychologists, social workers) receive specialized training in meeting the mental and behavioral health needs of students with disabilities. School counselors are trained to provide socio-emotional support for students. Furthermore the primary mission of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2015), is to prepare school counselors to address barriers and to assess ways to maximize students' success in schools, communities, and their family structures by offering education, prevention, crisis, and short-term interventions until the student is connected with available community resources. School counselors receive specific training to recognize warning signs (e.g., changes in school performance, attendance, mood changes, and trauma) and provide early intervention or crisis interventions that promote psychosocial wellness and development for students including students with disabilities (Foxx & Anderson, 2020).

Even though school counselor preparation programs train students to provide socio-emotional support to students of varying abilities, they lack specific knowledge and skills of EBPs in ABA, BIP, and FBA (McIntosh & Av-Gay, 2007). Researchers in the field of school counseling have noted that, while 83% of school counselors provide interventions and behavioral support for students with disabilities, many counselors have not completed course work during their graduate program specific to effective approaches to working with students with intensive disabilities (Milsom, 2002; Milsom & Akos, 2003). This is critical given there is a lack of school personnel with the expertise needed to provide successful behavior and mental health/trauma support to students with disabilities. McIntosh and Av-Gay recommend that schools cultivate expertise in FBA and note that teaching other school personnel (e.g., counselors) to effectively lead behavior support for working with students with intensive disabilities will yield better long-term effects in implementing EBPs then when related service professionals such as counselors, lack in their ability to effectively contribute on problem-solving teams due to their limited knowledge and skills in EBPs.

Shortages in Education Personnel

To further complicate issues surrounding the critical need for professionals trained to provide support and services to children with intensive challenges, many states report significant challenges in meeting the overall demand for quality, fully credentialed special education teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The shortages of highly qualified special education personnel tend to occur most notably in urban and rural communities (Bill et al., 2022; Mason-Williams et al., 2020; Peyton et al., 2021; Rock et al., 2016). This issue of teacher shortage has amplified to a critical level in many states since the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020. Researchers have predicted increased teacher shortages for some time; however, more recent national data suggests that not only are teachers leaving the profession at high-

er-than-expected rates, but they also are choosing to do so earlier than anticipated since the onset of the pandemic (Bill et al., 2022). As a result, many states have relaxed teacher licensure requirements leaving school administrators to hire individuals who are not fully credentialed and who are teaching while earning licensure through alternative pathways (Nagro, 2023a, 2023b). Similar to the issues surrounding teacher shortages, ASCA (2015) recommends a ratio of 1 school counselor per 250 students, yet the National Center on Educational Statistics (NCES) reports the national average is 408:1, with only 17 states averaging less than 350 students per counselor (NCES, 2021). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) 2023, there were about 336,000 school counselors employed in elementary and secondary education, falling short of ASCA's recommended ratio.

Continued shortages of special education teachers and related personnel (e.g., school counselors) negatively affect the quality of services provided to infants, toddlers, children, and credentialed education personnel is at a critical level across the country as the needs of all students, especially those needing intensive interventions, continue to increase and become more complex (Bill et al., 2022). Nagro (2023b) suggests the shortage of special education teachers is among the most pressing issues facing special education leaders and should motivate education professionals to work toward generating innovative strategies moving forward that are intended to alleviate the teacher shortage.

Rationale for Interdisciplinary Preparation

As a result of the increasing shortage of special education teachers and related service personnel, a few preparation programs have begun to explore *interdisciplinary professional preparation*. Interdisciplinary programs are defined as two or more disciplines training together through shared coursework, group assignments, and coordinated field experiences (Miller & Stayton, 2006; Smith, 2010). Although not new, interdisciplinary personnel preparation provides a feasible solution to the lack of shared knowledge and skills typically experienced by teachers and related service personnel when engaged in school-based teams providing EBPs for students with disabilities. For example, in early intervention Birth-K special education preparation programs, an interdisciplinary approach to training is considered *recommended best practice* (Miller & Stayton, 2006; Smith, 2010). K-12 education professionals may consider ways to replicate early intervention Birth-K special education interdisciplinary preparation and provide integrated training and ample opportunities for special education to practice effective collaboration skills (e.g., communication, building partnerships, planning, and decision-making) with other related service colleagues as well as students' families prior to serving on MTSS teams and making important decisions for K-12 students.

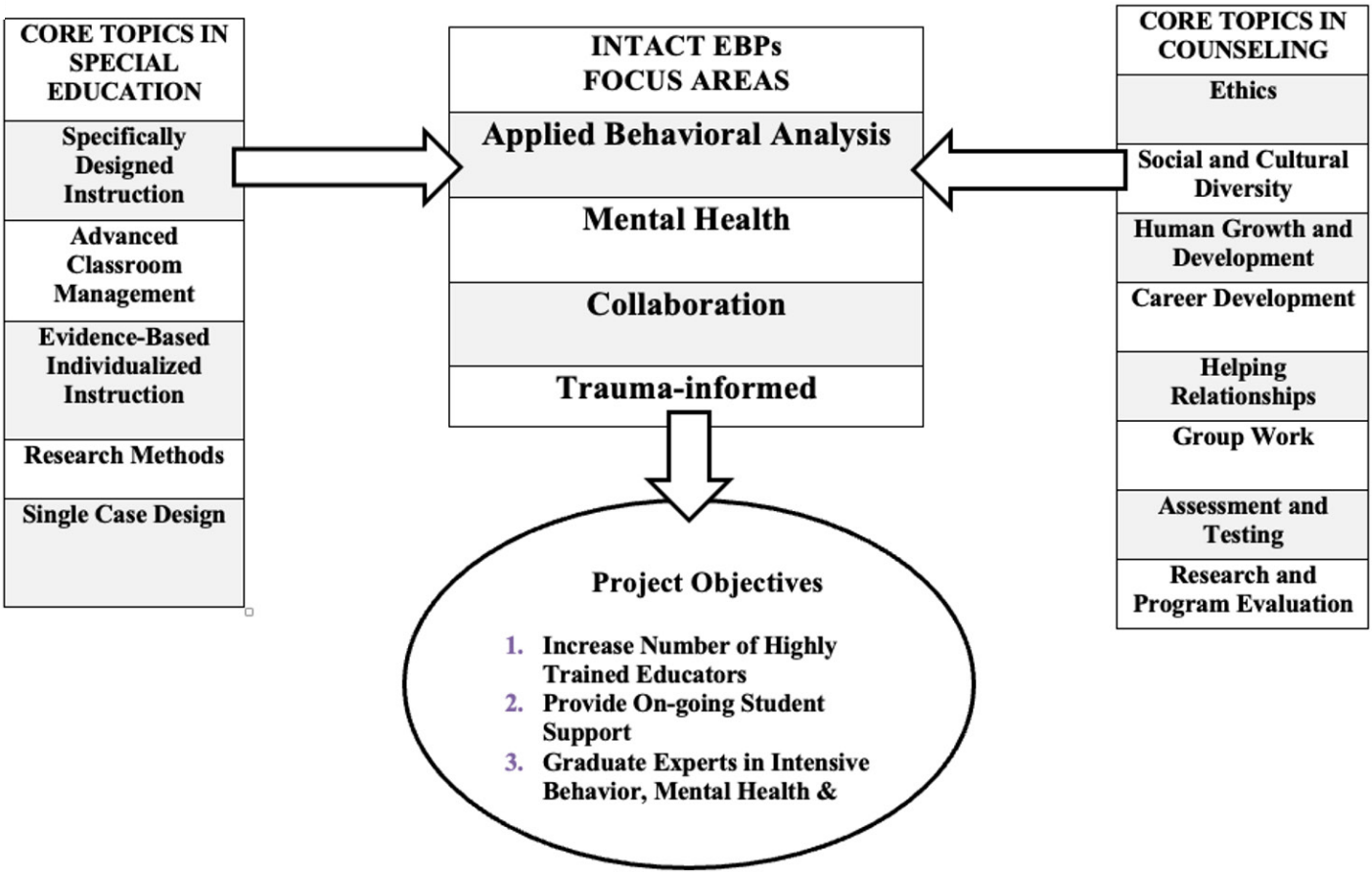
Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches to personnel preparation provide students with experience working and learning in team environments like those in which they are likely to work once employed (Smith, 2010). For most children with intensive needs, it is challenging for education personnel from across disciplines to work together in determining the best EBPs for a student in crisis because most professionals are trained in isolation, and lack shared knowledge, skills, and expertise with their colleagues from other disciplines (McIntosh & AvGay, 2007). Interdisciplinary approaches to personnel preparation, however, provide opportunities for special education teachers and related service personnel to combine and share expertise of discipline specific knowledge and skills through shared coursework and clinical field application.

Specifically, the intended outcome of interdisciplinary preparation programs is the development of shared expertise in delivery of special education supports and services, including early implementation of EBPs for students with disabilities. With this shared learning across disciplines, special education teachers and related service providers have a clearer understanding of cross-discipline-specific terminology, and knowledge of EBPs in working with students with challenging concerns. Using these shared skills, special education and related service professionals are better equipped to effectively collaborate in decision-making MTSS teams when determining the most appropriate needs and interventions for challenging students with disabilities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this article is to provide a model of an interdisciplinary preparation program that emphasizes shared training of special education teachers and counselors in their use of EBPs. Because there are gaps across special education teacher and counselor preparation programs in terms of acquiring professional skills necessary to effectively collaborate and fulfill their responsibilities on MTSS school teams, the two disciplines are a seemingly good fit for the creation of an interdisciplinary training program. By sharing our interdisciplinary preparation program, we describe steps involved in the determination of a related service graduate program that would naturally involve collaboration in schools with special education teachers, as well as determination of the selection of shared courses that would make up our interdisciplinary preparation component. The authors also share how logistical decisions were made across the two graduate programs to identify the steps involved in recruitment and determination of student

FIGURE 1: INTACT Project Overview



acceptance into the interdisciplinary preparation program. Finally, we share the benefits, barriers, challenges, and potential positive impacts of this alternative approach to educator preparation based on the INTACT outcomes over the past 7 years.

INTACT PREPARATION PROJECT

The INTACT Project originated out of response to a growing need for highly qualified and licensed special education teachers and related service professionals across our state. Fortunately, in 2017, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services published a grant competition focusing specifically on the creation of interdisciplinary preparation projects intended to prepare special education teachers, early intervention, and/or related service personnel for professional practice in classrooms and school settings in providing support to students with highly intensive disabilities. For most children with high-intensive needs, it can be extremely challenging for education personnel from various disciplines to work together on school support teams such as MTSS, in determining EBPs and practices because of their lack of shared knowledge, skills, and understanding of interventions (Quezada et al., 2021; Smith, 2010). Interdisciplinary approaches to personnel preparation, however, differ by providing opportunities for special education teachers and other related services to combine and share expertise of discipline specific knowledge and skills through opportunities to collaborate as well as practical application of EBPs in providing support to K-12 students with disabilities. We chose to focus our interdisciplinary training project on ABA, interdisciplinary collaboration, and mental health and trauma-informed EBPs due to the high percentage of students with disabilities across the state that were either suspended from school and/or sent to alternative learning placements each year because of their highly intensive behavior and often complex ability and/or social emotional and behavioral needs.

Our interdisciplinary preparation began with a conversation among three faculty members from two different departments within our college of education. The discussion centered on critical issues and topics not currently being addressed in our special education preparation programs and conversely the school counseling preparation training. From this interaction among faculty, it became

clear that each program had knowledge and skills not being addressed but that desperately needed to be included in both preparation programs. For example, our special education preparation training does not sufficiently address mental health conditions experienced by students in general as well as students with disabilities, as well as EBPs. Similarly, the faculty in counseling preparation voiced frustration with meeting professional standards in their core courses that specifically trained students in the school counselor preparation training to learn to work with students with disabilities. None of the counseling faculty have expertise in working with students with intensive behavioral disabilities and therefore, critical knowledge of EBPs related to supporting students with intensive behavior challenges is not taught in the counseling preparation programs. Regardless, graduates of the counseling preparation are asked to assist with developing behavior assessments and daily intervention plans in K-12 schools. As a result of this conversation, we decided to create an interdisciplinary preparation program that would provide curricular and clinical field opportunities for special education and counseling graduate students, while maintaining the integrity of the two distinctly different advanced degree programs.

Interdisciplinary Component of INTACT

Interdisciplinary personnel preparation differs in contrast to discipline-specific professional training in that students enrolled in special education and related service preparation are provided intentional opportunities to learn shared skills (e.g., crisis interventions, BIPs,) in classes together with other education professionals enabling them to practice collaboration more efficiently in terms of understanding knowledge, skills, and related terminology across disciplines.

In addition to the advanced coursework in each degree program, the interdisciplinary component of the INTACT Project focuses on building capacity of special education and counseling graduate students through their participation in a four-course sequence focusing specifically on learning ABA, interdisciplinary collaboration, and mental health and trauma related EBPs. The shared courses included in the INTACT Project are the following: (a) ethics in applied behavior analysis, (b) concepts and principles of behavior analysis, (c) consultation in school counseling, and (d) trauma-informed practices (see Figure 1). The INTACT shared courses are delivered online synchronously each semester during the academic year as well as summer sessions.

Students in the INTACT project enroll in the four shared interdisciplinary courses together, allowing them many opportunities to collaborate and build partnerships while completing class sessions and assignments. Course assignments and clinical field experiences are coordinated by course instructors allowing INTACT students several opportunities to collaborate on projects and share knowledge and discipline expertise with one another. Figure 1 illustrates the main topics of the advanced core courses of each degree program, the impact of the shared interdisciplinary courses, and the primary objectives of the INTACT Project.

The INTACT students also complete a year-long collaborative culminating assignment involving cross-discipline peer – pairs involving a counseling student and a special education student. In the collaborative assignment, students participate in consultation and problem-solving EBPs for their case students in their clinical K-12 schools. They are responsible for meeting throughout the final year in the INTACT program and their degree programs to discuss whether the interventions have been effective and those that have not been successful with their K-12 case students. At the conclusion of their degree programs and the interdisciplinary preparation training, the cross-discipline peer-pairs present their collaborative assignments in terms of progress made because of the EBPs implemented with their K-12 case students. Community partners (e.g., principals, special education directors, district administrators) and faculty from the university are invited to INTACT students' presentations of the outcomes from their collaboration and problem-solving culminating projects.

The information that follows describes the intentional planning of logistical aspects of an interdisciplinary program that would need to be negotiated before the shared training is launched and prior to enrolling students. For teacher educators interested in creating an interdisciplinary training program, the first step needs to focus on conceptualizing with a faculty member from a related service preparation program, what is the overarching goal of the shared preparation. One approach to determining a related service degree program is to examine local K-12 student and school/district data and asking community partners who are the critical education professionals that are expected to respond to the students with the most intense needs. Gathering input from principals, district administrators, teachers, and parents of students with disabilities will be invaluable in determining which professional degree program is the best fit and will be the most applicable to schools and professionals with the immediate region/state. At this step the two faculty members representing the preparation programs begin to engage in dialog about possibilities of identification of the knowledge and skills and EBPs most needed by special education teachers and related service professionals to

TABLE 1: Demographic Breakdown for INTACT Scholars (Cohorts 1, 2, 3, & 4; n=55

Degree Program	Number of Scholars	Percentage
Counseling	28	50.9%
Special Education	27	49.1%
Race		
Black	8	14.5%
White	41	74.5%
Hispanic or Latino	4	7.3%
Other	2	3.6%
Gender		
Female	44	80.0%
Male	9	16.4%
No Answer	2	3.6%
Current Job Positions		
GenEd Teacher	2	3.6%
SPED Teacher	23	41.8%
Administrator/Director	1	1.8%
Other	27	49.1%
No Answer	2	3.6%

effectively collaborate in the provision of services and support for students with disabilities.

Choosing a faculty peer collaborator in each discipline is a critical step in the process. The participating faculty leaders need to be committed to interdisciplinary preparation and value collaboration among educators. We chose to focus our interdisciplinary training on working with K-12 students with intensive behaviors, mental health, and trauma-related needs for the INTACT Program due to state data suggesting that students with disabilities (e.g., autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), intellectual disabilities, behavioral disabilities) received the highest frequency of disciplinary actions such as corporal punishment, expulsion, and/or removal from school settings to alternative learning placements. Additionally, the Department of Special Education and Child Development and Department of Counseling at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Cato College of Education have a long-standing collaborative relationship across several years so partnering with faculty from school counseling seemed most appropriate and natural. After reaching out to the school counseling faculty it was clear that collaboration with counseling faculty in the creation of the INTACT interdisciplinary preparation was a good fit because special education teachers and school counselors typically are the first responders in schools and therefore, the two graduate programs seemed perfect partners in exchanging knowledge and skills through shared coursework.

For special education preparation faculty considering creation of an interdisciplinary preparation program, an important lesson to note from our experience is to spend time negotiating shared course work, including time reviewing syllabi and talking with potential instructors about the purpose of the interdisciplinary collaboration students need to experience in the shared classes. This stage takes time and may not eliminate problems for students due to differences in schedules. We chose to guide the selection of courses included in the interdisciplinary training as shared coursework had to meet the following criteria: Be beneficial for special education and counseling students and be scheduled around core courses in each degree program. This is an important stage for the faculty representative from each degree program because it requires

TABLE 2: Demographic Breakdown for Graduated INTACT Scholars

	Follow Up C1	Follow Up C2	Follow Up C3	Percentages
Number of Scholars	n = 5	n = 9	n = 9	
Current Job Positions (n = 23)				
GenEd Teacher	0	0	0	0%
SPED Teacher	2	4	3	39.13%
School Counselor	3	3	5	47.82%
Administrator/Director	0	1	0	4.35%
Program Specialist	0	1	0	4.35%
Other	0	0	1	4.35%
Current School District (n = 21)				
CMS	3	2	2	26.08%
Other District	2	7	6	65.21%
Title 1 Status (n = 21)				
Yes	4	2	3	39.13%
No	1	7	5	56.52%

commitment to the shared course(s) to enroll students out of field, and thus, has major implications for how an instructor structures a shared class in terms of including opportunities for collaboration and exchange of knowledge and expertise among the special education and counseling students, and successful completion of major assignments. We have already switched out three of the four original shared courses in the INTACT project, and as a result we have different faculty involved as instructors then we did at the beginning of the project. Adjustments based on course evaluations, informal conversations with faculty and students are critical to the sustainability of the interdisciplinary program.

Everything from recruitment to entrance requirements of students as well as their progression in the interdisciplinary program need to be negotiated and decided by the faculty leaders and communicated and agreed upon by faculty of each degree program at the onset of initial planning. We encourage anyone that is considering initiating an interdisciplinary program to map out the project's overarching goals, objectives, and student performance outcomes that are critical proficiencies for students to acquire by completion of their training. The faculty leaders also need to discuss a means of evaluating the students' development of collaboration and leadership skills acquired throughout the shared courses and their degree programs. The INTACT project created a culminating event titled The INTACT Summer Institute, as a culminating event when students demonstrated their knowledge and skills learned within the shared courses such as the use of EBPs in special education and/or school counseling. Students work in peer pairs in the final year of the project and their degree programs, collaborating with a peer partner on identifying and utilizing EBPs for case students in their school sites.

To date, a total of 55 students have successfully graduated from the INTACT Project (see Table 1). According to responses to our follow-up survey, which was sent to 55 INTACT graduates, 23 of whom responded to the post-graduation survey. Of those respondents, we learned that INTACT graduates are employed across a variety of occupations, specifically school counseling, administration and program specialists. Of the graduates working in school systems, seven are employed within a large urban district and 15 were reported as 'other,' with nine out of the 23 graduates working in Title 1 Status schools (see Table 2).

LESSONS LEARNED FROM INTACT AND FINAL THOUGHTS

This article shares one example of an interdisciplinary preparation program involving special education teachers and school counselors at the graduate level. The authors share their experiences working with the INTACT students as well as the lessons learned from the first seven years of the program. Feedback from graduates of the INTACT program

has been invaluable in terms of its' use in continuous improvement of the project as well as identifying the benefits of the program for students. Entry, midpoint, and exit surveys were the primary measures used to collect feedback from our INTACT students on the benefits of the collaborative field experiences and interdisciplinary courses in ABA and mental health, and trauma-informed EBPs.

Graduates of INTACT shared written comments on follow-up surveys about the positive impact of the 2-year interdisciplinary partnering they experienced throughout the project. INTACT graduates stated that through the opportunities to build partnerships with special education and counseling students, they increased their confidence to effectively collaborate with other professionals, elevated professional relationships, and generated a more comprehensive set of skills across students from both degree programs. The following comment made by an INTACT graduate in her exit survey responses stated how she is currently using the knowledge and skills acquired in the interdisciplinary training,

"I am a member of our school improvement and MTSS district team. I am able to use the skills and information acquired in the INTACT program to help our school and district meet the needs of students with challenging behaviors or mental health needs."

Graduates also noted specific benefits to having participated in the program. For example, one graduate stated he perceived "Opportunities to collaborate across disciplines to better understand one another," and another "Increased knowledge . . . of role clarification, perspective, approach, and intentionality."

Finally, graduates of the INTACT Project shared their appreciation for the realistic and impactful opportunities to gain experience from peers across disciplines through intervention research projects and school-based internships, shared expertise, knowledge, and interactive applications of professional MTSS teaming skills in the required shared classes (e.g., activities and/or major assignments in shared courses requiring students to collaborate and problem-solve, as well as their culminating collaborative projects). This feedback suggests alternative preparation such as the INTACT Program has the potential to elevate graduate students' preparedness to deliver high-quality services and support for K-12 students with disabilities in terms of meeting their needs of intensive support, mental health, and/or trauma-related intervention services.

In this article, the description of the INTACT Project is intended to provide one example of an interdisciplinary preparation training program meant to bolster the development of collaborative knowledgeability among special education teachers and school counselors. What distinguishes the INTACT preparation is its unique focus on special education training in alliance with school counseling preparation as a shared multi-tiered partnership of cohesive support to K-12 students in need of intensive interventions. With the identified shortages of high-quality and fully credentialed special education teachers and related personnel, there is a clear need for additional examples of interdisciplinary educator preparation programs. Barriers for students in the INTACT Project illuminate areas for growth and adaptation in the creation and implementation of interdisciplinary preparation in the future. Because of the absence of other examples of interdisciplinary preparation for K-12 special education teachers and related service providers, further investigation that expands knowledge through exemplary models of this alternative training is imperative and worth consideration and exploration.

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Supporting Preservice Special Education Teachers: Fostering Community in Online Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT

The increase in online courses in preservice special education has reshaped the landscape of teacher preparation, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Research underscores the importance of creating a culture of belonging in both face-to-face and online spaces, as it has been shown to enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. However, challenges related to physical distance, limited synchronous interactions, and feelings of isolation can hinder students' sense of connection and community in online learning environments. Instructors play a pivotal role in cultivating learning and a sense of belonging in online spaces by intentionally designing online courses that actively foster inclusion and interpersonal connections. This article explores the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework as a tool for intentionally supporting learning and creating a culture of belonging in online preservice special education programs. We provide practical strategies for four critical instructional areas: collaborative small group activities, asynchronous discussion boards, required readings, and online lectures. For each area, we offer evidence-based approaches and illustrative examples for enhancing the cognitive, social, and teaching presence dimensions of the CoI framework. By implementing these targeted approaches, instructors can mitigate barriers in online courses and create more supportive and connected learning experiences for preservice special education teachers.

KEYWORDS

Assigned readings, Community of Inquiry, discussion posts, lectures online instruction, small group activities

Dr. Jane Hartley, a faculty member in a preservice special education teacher preparation program, was recently asked to teach online courses for the first time. Having never taught courses in this modality, Dr. Hartley is concerned about her ability to effectively engage students, particularly given her own negative experiences as a student in online courses. Specifically, during her time as an online learner, she struggled to feel connected to both her instructors and peers, often feeling isolated and disconnected from the course content and community. Further, she found it difficult to develop a sense of belonging, and the lack of face-to-face interaction made it challenging to feel visible and valued in her learning environment. These past struggles have left her apprehensive about her ability to foster a supportive, collaborative, and inclusive online space. Dr. Hartley is also aware that her students bring a wide range of linguistic backgrounds and educational experiences to the virtual classroom, and that these may compound feelings of disconnection in online learning environments. Specifically, she recognizes that English is a second language for some of her students and that some of her students have had limited experiences with collaborative learning and self-directed engagement in online formats.

Recent years have seen an increase in online courses in preservice preparation programs and offering online courses has been identified as a strategy for addressing teacher shortages and expanding pathways for career development (e.g., Oluk, 2023; Naranjo, 2022). Although online learning platforms offer flexibility and increased accessibility, the transition to online instruction requires careful consideration of course design and implementation to ensure effectiveness (Arrington, 2021). Included among the issues to consider are ways to create a culture of belonging that is designed to enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. This article aims to explore the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework as a tool for supporting learning and creating a culture of belonging in online preservice special education programs. It offers practical strategies for instructors to enhance preservice special education students' learning experience and outcomes in virtual settings. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) is a framework that can be helpful to instructors as they design and implement online courses (Garrison, 2016). The CoI identifies three key categories of presence to support learning in online courses. The three categories are cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Cognitive presence involves motivating students to cognitively engage with course content, social presence emphasizes communication and interaction with the instructor and peers in the class, while teaching presence includes elements of instructional design such as the organization of the course, facilitating discussion, and instruction to support student understanding (Garrison, 2016). These elements, when effectively integrated, can create a supportive learning community that enhances student learning, engagement, and satisfaction (Lambert & Fisher, 2013).

Jackson and Yang (2024) discussed how to use the CoI framework in online preservice special education courses and provided specific examples and activities that can be embedded into the different functions of online learning management systems (such as Canvas) to support each of these presences. Included among the many examples provided by the authors were supporting a cognitive presence when using the discussion post function by providing scaffolding to support critical thinking; supporting a teaching presence when using the announcement function by frequently posting announcements that provide explicit information about assignments and expectations; and supporting a social presence through collaborative platforms that create opportunities to develop a community structure that recognizes and builds upon the unique experiences and interests of individuals students.

Dr. Hartley reviewed the literature related to the CoI framework and, as she developed her new online courses, she was mindful of the three categories of presence (cognitive, teaching, and social). She referred frequently to the examples provided by Jackson & Yang (2024) as she developed and started providing instruction her courses. As a result of her efforts, Dr. Hartley felt better prepared to foster a supportive, collaborative, and inclusive online space for her preservice teachers and noted that the students were more actively engaging with her, with the course content, and with peers. Despite these positive outcomes, Dr. Hartley still feels that relative to her experiences as an instructor of face-to-face courses, students in her online courses are less engaged and connected; particularly in the context of collaborative small group activities, asynchronous online discussions, engagement with required readings, and when she is providing lectures. This leaves her wanting to explore additional ways that she can use the CoI framework in the design and implementation of these specific activities.

Dr. Hartley's experience is not unique. Despite efforts to utilize the CoI framework in the design and implementation of online courses, challenges persist with regarding to fully supporting students. The following sections expand upon the work of Jackson & Lang (2024) by summarizing strategies and providing specific examples of ways to use the CoI framework in the design and implementation of four different types of activities that are frequently embedded into online courses in preservice special education preparation programs. Specifically, strategies and examples for using the CoI framework in the design and implementation of activities are provided for collaborative small group activities, asynchronous online discussions, required readings, and lectures.

COLLABORATIVE SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

Small group collaborative and cooperative learning activities in college courses are often used to foster deeper engagement with course material, enhance critical thinking, and promote the development of interpersonal skills (Svinicki et al., 2014). Small group activities encourage students to actively participate in discussions, share diverse perspectives, and work together to solve problems, which can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter as well as a more interactive and dynamic learning experience (e.g., O'Donnell, 2006). Additionally, small group activities cultivate a collaborative mindset that

students can carry forward into their work as special educators.

When considered in the context of the CoI framework, research suggests that virtual small group activities can (a) foster the social presence through peer relationships and community building, (b) enhance the teaching presence via structured facilitation and guidance, (c) support the cognitive presence through collaborative problem-solving and knowledge construction, and (d) promote student well-being and academic success by cultivating connection and belonging (Bliss et al., 2021). There are a wide range of small group activities that can be used in the context of in-person or online courses, including:

- case studies or real-world problems that students discuss in small groups and come up with a solution, plan, or strategy (e.g., Fixen, 2024),
- debates where students are divided into teams and assigned opposing sides of topic (and after a preparation period in their breakout rooms, each team presents their arguments; Brown & Wilson, 2016),
- jigsaw methods where each group is responsible for a different piece of information, and then they come together to share and combine what they learned into a full picture (Baken et al., 2020).
- role-play simulations where students take on specific roles and work together to solve a problem or engage in a discussion as those characters (Barrera et al., 2020),
- peer reviews where students work in groups to provide feedback on each other's work, whether it's an essay, project, or presentation (e.g., Shaw et al., 2023),
- motor synchrony activities where students work together to perform a series of physical movements or tasks in time with one another (e.g., implementing steps of a prompt hierarchy, demonstrating knowledge of the components of a complex motor skill, etc.; Dickman, 2023).
- virtual scavenger hunts where students work together to find specific items or information online based on a set of clues or challenges (e.g., Spence, 2021), and
- escape rooms that involve a scenario with multiple challenges that students need to solve to "escape" or complete the task (using websites and technological tools such as roomescapemaker.com, escapely.com, or a combination of Google Slides and Forms; Bilbao-Quintana, 2021; Manzano-Leon et al., 2021).

Although well-poised to support all three presences of the CoI framework, challenges may emerge when implementing small group activities in online learning environments. For example, when establishing a teaching presence, instructors may struggle to monitor and provide timely support to students when they are distributed across multiple breakout rooms. Further, the communication presence may be strained, as the absence of face-to-face interaction limits non-verbal cues like body language and eye contact, which are crucial for fostering connection and trust for students as well as instructors. Additionally, cognitive presence may suffer when instructors struggle to encourage critical thinking in an environment where it's harder to gauge student engagement and comprehension. Thus, supporting all three presences in small group activities in online courses requires careful planning, structured interactions, and appropriate support (e.g., Kalaian, 2021). Figure 1 provides a planning form that summarizes issues to consider when designing and implementing small group activities in online environments to address these challenges. As noted by Figure, 1, when designing and implementing small group activities in online environments, instructors should consider the desired outcomes and format of the activity, as well as specific strategies for supporting the cognitive, teaching, and social presence within the activity.

Dr. Hartley is excited about the new information that she learns in terms of designing and implementing small group activities in online courses in a manner that supports the three categories of the CoI Framework. Dr. Hartley uses her new knowledge to create an online small group activity to support preservice special education teachers as they learn to write Functional Behavioral Assessment summaries. Using the planning form (see Figure 1), Dr. Hartley specifies the learning objectives (e.g. writing objective behavior descriptions, analyzing data, etc.) and decides to use an escape room format in the design and implementation of her activity. Dr. Hartley makes decisions about how many clues will be provided and the icons/photos that will be used to represent each clue. For example, clues about referral information will be linked to the image of a filing cabinet, and information about the direct observation data and the function of the behavior will be linked to the image of the student. Then, based on her learning objectives, Dr. Hartley creates a document and short video that provides background information/instructions (e.g., the context for the case, expectations for students, etc.), as well as a set of Google forms that groups must complete as they work through the clues within the escape room. Once these steps are completed, Dr. Hartley creates a google slide with the background photo of the environment (e.g., a classroom) and inserts the icons/photos representing the

FIGURE 1: Planning Form: Recommended Practices for Supporting the CoI Framework in Small Group Activities in Online Environments

Planning Form

Using the CoI Framework and Recommended Practices for Small Group Activities in Online Environments

Desired Preservice Teacher Outcomes:
(What should the preservice teacher learn or be able to do because of this small group activity? Are all outcomes observable and measurable?)

Small Group Activity Format:
- ☐ Case study or Real-world problem
- ☐ Debate
- ☐ Jigsaw
- ☐ Role-play Simulation
- ☐ Collaborative Data Analysis
- ☐ Peer Review
- ☐ Motor Synchrony
- ☐ Virtual Scavenger Hunt
- ☐ Escape Room

Task Analysis:
(Clearly identify each step in the activity.)

Strategies to Support the Cognitive, Social, and Teaching Presence:
(Refer to the desired outcomes and task analysis to select strategies that align with the desired outcomes and support the three presences of the CoI framework. Select all that apply.)

Technology Tools:
- ☐ Shared documents (e.g., Microsoft Office 365, GoogleDocs, etc) that allow multiple students to work simultaneously on the same document.
- ☐ Collaboration and Virtual Whiteboarding Tools (e.g., Miro, Jamboard, Padlet) where groups can collaborate visually. Students can brainstorm, share ideas, and draw diagrams in real-time.
- ☐ Asynchronous Discussion and Chat Tools (e.g., Slack, Google Chat, Discord) that allows students to engage in both asynchronous and real-time communication.
- ☐ Project Management Tools (e.g., Trello, Asana, etc.) that help groups organize tasks, set deadlines, and track progress.
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Characteristics of the Online Environment:
- ☐ Small number of students (3-4) per group
- ☐ Require all cameras on
- ☐ Limit breakout sessions to under 20 minutes
- ☐ Assign and regularly rotate roles (notetaker, timekeeper, facilitator, reporter) within each small group to keep everyone engaged and ensure responsibilities are shared.
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Instructor Feedback and Support:
- ☐ Post written instructions in a shared document (Google Docs, Canvas, etc.) to ensure that students know what they need to accomplish, any deliverables, and how they can get assistance.
- ☐ Record a short video or provide an audio explanation or "walk-through" of the task, which can be accessed anytime during the activity.
- ☐ Monitor the breakout rooms to provide support as needed, ensuring no group gets stuck or strays off task.
- ☐ Set clear time limits and reminders using timers in Zoom or set deadlines for collaborative projects to keep groups on track.
- ☐ Provide a set of questions or topics for discussion to guide the group's conversation and help them stay focused.
- ☐ Create scaffolded questions to support critical thinking and simultaneously broadcast the messages to all breakout rooms throughout the activity
- ☐ Bring students back together in the main meeting room and allow each group to present their findings, ideas, or results. Consider using a shared Google Slide or Padlet where each group can add their contribution.
- ☐ Promote accountability and help students to recognize their contributions by using peer evaluations (e.g., Google Forms) to let students assess each other's participation and collaboration after activities.
- ☐ Other: _____

Other: _____

different clues, with hyperlinks to the corresponding google forms, onto the background photo. Dr. Hartley also inserts a clock (using a YouTube timer) so that students can track how much time they have left to complete the activity. Once complete, Dr. Hartley publishes her escape room activity to the web for student access. In addition to teaching technical skills related to functional behavioral assessment, this activity models the collaborative problem-solving approach special educators will need when working with multidisciplinary teams to address complex behavioral challenges in their future classrooms and mirrors the real-world documentation and analysis process that special educators must master for IEP development and behavior intervention planning. Interested readers can access Dr. Hartley's activity here.

ONLINE DISCUSSIONS POSTS

Discussions are a frequently used pedagogical tool in online courses because they foster critical thinking, facilitate the application of theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, and promote collaborative learning (Koehler et al., 2021). Further, research reveals a positive correlation between online discussion board engagement and higher grades (Walker et al. 2013). Discussion activities in online courses can be used to encourage preservice special education teachers to engage deeply with course content, reflect on diverse perspectives, and construct their understanding of complex issues related to special education. Additionally, discussion-based learning environments support preservice educators to develop empathy and work collaboratively with peers, which are essential for effective teaching in diverse and inclusive classrooms.

When framed within the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, discussions serve as a powerful means to cultivate an integrated learning environment that enhances the social, teaching, and cognitive presences. For example, social presence is supported through discussions by encouraging students to express their personal perspectives and creating an inclusive atmosphere where diverse viewpoints are valued. Further, teaching presence is supported through the instructor's guidance in structuring meaningful discussion prompts, providing feedback, and facilitating interactions that deepen understanding. Finally cognitive presence is advanced through discussion activities that challenge students to analyze complex issues, problem-solve, and build on the ideas of others.

Although certainly possible, designing and implementing discussion board activities in online classes that effectively support the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework may present several challenges. Specifically, in fostering the social presence, the lack of synchronous face-to-face interactions can limit opportunities for students to form authentic connections, express themselves, and engage in meaningful interpersonal exchanges. Further, supporting the teaching presence can be challenging in an online format, as instructors must carefully craft discussion prompts that stimulate critical thinking and scaffold engagement in a manner that is not only effective for students but also recognizes potential limitations regarding the amount of time available for the instructor (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2007).

DeNoyelles et al (2014) summarized evidence-based strategies to address several of these challenges within the CoI framework. Strategies to support the social presence include instructor modelling of behaviors that help build a collaborative and trusting learning community (e.g., addressing a person by name, sharing personal or professional experiences), and requiring discussion assignments (e.g., by assigning points to the activities) to provide extrinsic motivation for students to interact and to engage in productive discussions. Strategies to support the cognitive presence include creating discussion prompts that guide students through four phases: (a) the identification of an issue, (b) an exchange of ideas or information about the issue (exploration), (c) the connection or integration of ideas, and (b) the application of the new ideas to other contexts. Finally, strategies to support the teaching presence included; ensuring that instructor feedback is timely but limited so that it encourages student involvement while also being feasible with instructor workload; supporting peer facilitation in discussion groups where members of the group are assigned specific roles (e.g., one student presents an idea, another student provides evidence to support or connect the idea to the literature, etc.); establishing well-defined goals, roles, rules and deadlines for interactions; and providing instructor feedback through multiple modes (audio, video, text). Figure 2 provides a planning form that includes these recommended practices and additional issues to consider when designing and implementing online discussions.

Included in Figure 2 are technology tools that instructors may consider using in the context of online discussion boards. These tools have the potential to enhance the quality of discussions, increase student motivation, and increase instructor efficiency. For example, Padlet is a free web-based application that allows teachers to create free-flowing discussions. In addition

FIGURE 2: Planning Form: Recommended Practices for Supporting the CoI Framework in Discussion Boards in Online Environments

Planning Form

Using the CoI Framework and Recommended Practices for Discussion Boards in Online Environments

Discussion Topic:

Desired Preservice Teacher Outcomes:
(What should the preservice teacher learn or be able to as a result of engaging in the online discussion board? Are all outcomes observable and measurable?)

Discussion Prompt Format:
- ☐ Problem-based prompt that focuses on a problem that is related to the course content and asks students to work together to
- ☐ formulate solutions.
- ☐ Project-based prompts that create concrete products or artifacts that engage them in solving a problem
- ☐ Debate prompts where students argue for or against a position, with the intention of persuading others to assume the same position.
- ☐ Other:

Strategies to Support the Cognitive, Social, and Teaching Presence:
(Based upon the desired outcomes listed above, select strategies that align with the desired outcomes and support the three presences of the CoI framework. Select all that apply.)

Discussion Post Guidelines:
- ☐ Establish clear expectations for discussions (e.g., frequency of posts, definition of a "meaningful post", etc.)
- ☐ Create a rubric to clarify grading criteria for posts (e.g., depth of analysis, critical thinking, and peer interaction).
- ☐ Limit the time window for initial posts and responses to create a sense of urgency and encourage consistent involvement.

Instructor Facilitation:
- ☐ Ask questions and provide feedback that is designed to help students to:
  - o identify the problem or articulate an issue
  - o exchange ideas or information about the issue
  - o connect or integrate of ideas
  - o apply new ideas to other contexts
  - o clarify thinking
  - o challenge assumptions
  - o provide evidence to support an argument
  - o to provide opposing evidence or alternative viewpoints
- ☐ Model behaviors that help build a collaborative and trusting learning community (e.g., addressing a person by name, sharing
- ☐ personal or professional experiences
- ☐ Respond regularly to student posts to model active engagement and guide the conversation
- ☐ Provide minimal levels of feedback to encourage students to take ownership of the discussion
- ☐ Begin with lower-level prompts that encourage simple reflection and gradually increase the complexity of discussion topics.
- ☐ Other: _____

Technological Tools and Supports
- ☐ Use (and encourage students to use) a variety of media, such as videos, podcasts, or infographics, to supplement discussion
- ☐ prompts and responses
- ☐ Occasionally hold live, synchronous sessions (e.g., Q&A session, brief lectures) that complement the discussion board and
- ☐ reinforce concepts.
- ☐ Conduct periodic online surveys or polls to gauge student engagement levels and identify barriers to participation.
- ☐ Use software that supports free-flowing discussions (e.g, Padlet)
- ☐ Use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) as a "teaching assistant" to support instructors to generate draft responses to student posts
- ☐ Other: _____

Other: _____

to text, students can leave likes, votes, stars, and comments to other student's posts. Discussion boards created in Padlet can be embedded into learning management systems such as Canvas, and Padlet now includes an option to use AI to assist instructors to generate discussion prompts. Another technological support that instructors may consider is the use of AI text generators (e.g., ChatGPT) as a "teaching assistant" to generate draft responses to student posts. For example, in the context of course content related to the use of prompt hierarchies to support learning for students with disabilities, an instructor may ask students to think critically about when to use a most-to-least vs. least-to-most prompt hierarchy. The instructor could use an AI text generator to draft responses to student posts. The instructor can then revise the draft responses as needed to more clearly connect with course content. Using the AI text generator in this manner may save the instructor time, allow for more engaging interactions with students, and provide a model for high-level analysis that students can learn from. In addition to using an AI text generator to draft responses to individual students, instructors could also use an AI text generator to provide a draft of a bullet-pointed summary of all ideas presented by students. This summary could then be used by the instructor to expand upon or highlight themes across student responses. It is important to note that instructors who use AI in this manner should be transparent with students. This could be accomplished by adding a statement to relevant discussion posts such as, "As part of my commitment to providing timely, constructive feedback on discussion posts, I'm utilizing AI tools like ChatGPT to help me draft responses more efficiently. I will personalize and revise all AI-generated drafts based on your posts and course content to ensure they reflect the depth of discussion we're aiming for in this course. If you ever have any questions about my responses, feel free to ask—I'm happy to discuss them further!"

Dr. Hartley's experiences (as a student as well as an instructor) with online discussion boards were not very positive. As a student, she felt like required online discussions lacked depth. As an instructor, Dr. Hartley struggled to find the time to support discussions in a way that truly advanced student learning and engagement. However, after reviewing recent research on online discussions, she was confident that well-structured discussion boards could play a key role in overcoming these challenges. Drawing from the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, and using the Planning Form provided in Figure 2, Dr. Hartley crafted a discussion activity centered around a specific content area of the course (i.e., creating opportunities for students with complex communication needs to engage in meaningful interactions with peers). She knew this was a complicated issue, and she needed a way to encourage her students to engage with it deeply. To support the discussion, Dr. Hartley designed a series of discussion prompts that she delivered sequentially to support students in identifying an issue, exploring the issue, connecting and integrating ideas, and applying new ideas. To build social presence, Dr. Hartley started the discussion with a video post where she shared a brief personal story about her experiences in supporting students with complex communication needs. She also addressed students by name in her responses to discussion posts to create a more personalized atmosphere. Recognizing that students might feel isolated in an online environment, she encouraged them to share their own experiences and perspectives, making it clear that all viewpoints were valuable. Understanding the importance of teaching presence, Dr. Hartley carefully structured the discussion to guide students' engagement. Each discussion board post was worth points, and she provided timely feedback that included a mix of text, audio, and video to create a more dynamic presence. To facilitate deeper cognitive engagement and save time, Dr. Hartley also used AI as a tool to draft responses to students' posts. After reviewing the draft, Dr. Hartley personalized it by integrating specific elements from the student's post, ensuring that the response was relevant and reflective of the student's unique perspective.

REQUIRED READINGS

Despite university instructors believing that reading outside of scheduled class time is essential for learning, students often view the completion of required readings as optional and time-consuming (Hollander et al., 2022). Although not specific to online courses in preservice special education programs, research indicates that only 20-30% of students complete required readings. Cited reasons for why students do not complete readings include 1) unpreparedness, 2) lack of motivation, 3) time constraints, and 4) an underestimation of reading importance (Kerr & Frese, 2017).

The literature provides a range of strategies for supporting students in completing required readings, and the CoI Framework can be used to provide a structured approach for conceptualizing and organizing those strategies. Specifically, to foster the cognitive and teaching presence, instructors might consider strategies such as; providing direct guidance and support in how

to read and critically analyze academic reading, developing a checklist to guide students in the analysis of different components of a research article, creating opportunities in online synchronous sessions for instructor modelling of how to approach the reading process, administering quizzes that count towards the final grade to motivate students to read, and carefully selecting the content that will be accessed via readings and considering if students can access other content via other modes of communication (e.g., videos or podcasts), and providing access to text-to-speech tools (e.g., Speechify) which allows students to have websites, documents, and images read to them (e.g., Brown et al., 2016; Dixon, 2010; Horning, 2013; Rangachari & Mierson, 1995). When considering providing content through a podcast, instructors can utilize digital tools like NotebookLM—an AI-powered tool from Google—to generate podcasts based on assigned readings to support learning (Hew, 2009). Because the podcast is generated via AI, it will be important for instructors to review for accuracy and create supporting materials to clarify content as needed. See Supplemental Materials for a task analysis to convert reading materials into a podcast using NotebookLM.

Fostering a social presence in reading assignments may not often be considered given that required readings are often seen as activities that are completed in isolation. However, instructors can enhance social presence by integrating required readings into broader activities, such as small group discussions and real-world application exercises, fostering deeper engagement and meaningful connections (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Further, instructors can consider using online tools (e.g., Perusall, Hypothesis) that support students in working collaboratively to annotate text and increase individual and group engagement with required class readings (Mitsaki, 2024).

Dr. Hartley recently published a book chapter that summarized evidence-based strategies for supporting communication and social interaction for students with complex communication needs in general education classrooms. The content embedded within the book chapter was a cornerstone for one of her class sessions and the chapter was an assigned reading. Using the CoI framework, Dr. Hartley considered ways to make the content in the book chapter more engaging and accessible. She decided to use NotebookLM to transform the chapter into a dynamic podcast. The podcast, which was both informative and conversational, featured an explanation of the core concepts in an easy-to-understand yet academically rigorous format. Because the podcast was generated via AI, Dr. Hartley noticed that there were a few points that weren't emphasized as much as she wished and/or needed to be clarified for accuracy. Therefore, Dr. Hartley created a document to accompany the podcast. This document was designed to further explain content and posed several questions designed to foster critical thinking and help students apply what they learned to real-world scenarios. Students responded to the questions posed in the document as part of an assignment that Dr. Hartley used to assess learning. This use of multimedia learning tools (e.g., a podcast plus an accompanying document) helped Dr. Hartley's students not only understand the content but also feel empowered to apply it practically. The podcast format was also helpful in that it allowed students with different reading proficiencies, including English language learners, to access complex material through auditory means. Further, the conversational tone of the podcast made the content feel more approachable, particularly for students who were less familiar with academic jargon.

LECTURES

The purpose of lectures in college courses is to efficiently deliver fundamental information related to course content to students (Sandhu et al., 2012). However, instructor lectures (regardless of whether they are in person or online) are often ineffective for knowledge retention and deeper learning and result in passive learning with limited student engagement (Sandhu et al., 2012; Thwin & Lwin, 2017). Instructors can address these challenges using mini-lectures (sometimes referred to as micro-learning) that are interspersed with active learning opportunities such as small group activities and discussions to improve outcomes (Thwin & Lwin, 2017). Studies have reported improved student learning outcomes, increased satisfaction, and higher retention rates when incorporating mini-lectures into online courses (Carter & Youssef-Morgan, 2022; Hsin & Cigas, 2013). In online courses, mini-lectures may be delivered live (e.g., via ZOOM) or may be recorded and then uploaded into a learning management system, such as Canvas, for students to view asynchronously. Zakrajsek & Nilson (2023) discuss that mini-lectures are particularly well-suited for situations when; (a) students need to acquire foundational information quickly, (b) instructors want to model discipline-based thinking and demonstrate how the instructor, as an expert, thinks about a topic, (c) providing information about an assignment or activity will be executed, and (d) students already possess foundational knowledge

TABLE 1: Digital tools to Support Gamification in Online Courses

TOOL	WEBSITE	DESCRIPTION
Brainscape	https://www.brainscape.com	Online app that helps students to learn using flashcards with features designed to support active recall, retention, and metacognition
Kahoot	https://kahoot.com	A game-based platform that allows instructors to create multiple-choice quiz-style games
OpenBadges	https://openbadges.org	A system that allows instructors to create, issue, and manage badges that can be awarded in response to achievements in learning
Blooket	https://www.blooket.com/	A game platform that allows instructors to create quizzes and games

and have high interest in a topic.

Mini-lectures can be a valuable tool for supporting the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework in online courses. Specifically, mini-lectures can be useful in supporting the teaching presence of the CoI by providing a way for instructors to deliver focused, structured content in a manner that guides students through key concepts and demonstrates their expertise. Further, mini-lectures can be useful in supporting the cognitive presence providing foundational knowledge base that allows students to actively engage in deeper critical thinking and meaningful discussion. Finally, mini-lectures can support the social presence by providing a structured way for instructors to share personal insights and establish a connection with students.

Although mini-lectures can be useful in supporting a social presence between the instructor and the students, it's also important to incorporate strategies to facilitate peer-to-peer interaction and further strengthen the sense of community. Gamification may be a useful concept to consider for facilitating peer-to-peer interaction. Gamification incorporates game-like elements (e.g., points, badges, leaderboards, levels, and challenges) into an online learning platform to increase student engagement and motivation (Urh et al., 2015). Key elements of gamification include rule-based systems, clear goals, immediate feedback, positive reinforcement systems, and measurable progress. In addition to supporting the social presence, gamification can also support the cognitive presence through opportunities to engage with course content in gamified format. Although the specific features of a game will vary based upon the population of students and the course objectives (Werbach & Hunter, 2012), there are a wide range of digital tools to support the implementation of gamification. Table 1 provides examples of digital tools that are free (or have free options) that instructors may use to support gamification in their courses.

Dr. Hartley aimed to enhance student learning and engagement in her online course sessions through mini-lectures and gamification. She focused her initial efforts on an online synchronous session via ZOOM about systematic instructional strategies. She prepared three 12-minute mini-lectures and used Blooket to create 10-item quizzes that corresponded with each mini-lecture. These quizzes automatically awarded points based on correct answers. At the start of the Zoom session, Dr. Hartley explained the class session would include a competition. Students were divided into four teams, with the incentive of waiving an upcoming low-stakes assignment for teams that earned at least 28 points. Teams earned points by answering quiz questions correctly. After each mini-lecture, students worked together in breakout rooms to complete the quizzes while Dr. Hartley visited each room to monitor engagement. Dr. Hartley repeated the mini-lecture and quiz cycle two more times. At the end of the third quiz, three teams earned the prize by earning at least 28 points, while the fourth team did not. Dr. Hartley dismissed members of the first three teams but stayed online with the fourth team, helping them understand missed content so they could also earn the prize. Reflecting on the session, Dr. Hartley noted that the gamified approach to learning systematic instruction techniques not only supported learning of essential content but also modeled how special educators can break down complex skills

into manageable steps with built-in reinforcement, an important practice for teaching students with disabilities. Further, Dr. Hartley recognized that the interactive format provided multiple entry points for engagement, enabling students with varied learning experiences or language proficiency to access the material in ways that felt meaningful and manageable. Through group collaboration, students had opportunities to draw on diverse perspectives and support one another in interpreting key concepts.

CONCLUSION

As online courses continue to play a significant role in preservice special education teacher preparation, it is essential that instructors carefully consider how their course design and instructional strategies promote student engagement, learning, and a sense of belonging. The purpose of this article was to explore the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework as a tool for achieving these goals in virtual learning environments. By intentionally embedding strategies to support the cognitive, teaching, and social presence of the COI framework, instructors can mitigate some of the common challenges associated with online learning in the context of small group activities, discussion posts, required readings, and lectures. When implemented with intentionality, these strategies can help foster a more connected, inclusive, and supportive online learning environment. As a result, preservice special education students are more likely to experience meaningful engagement, improved academic outcomes, and a stronger sense of community.

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Share Your VOICE: Using the VOICE Framework to Support Faculty Scholarship at Teaching-Focused Universities

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ABSTRACT

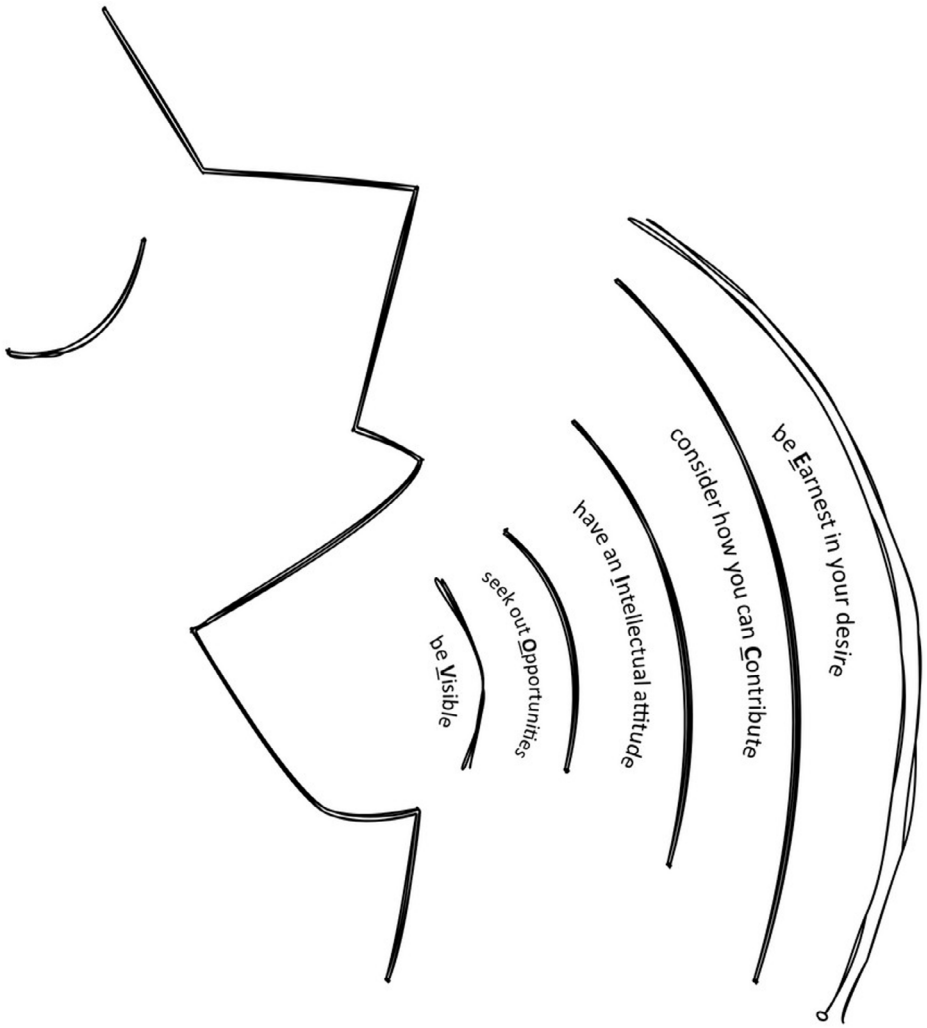
University faculty are expected to engage in a variety of tasks, with a specific focus on teaching, scholarship, and service (Mamiseishvili et al., 2016). The importance placed on each of these three pillars of academia differs based on the type of institute of higher education (IHE) in which one works. However, all three pillars are vital for success, including the goal of achieving promotion and tenure. More recently, an increased emphasis has been placed on scholarship at both research and teaching-focused universities (Schimanski & Alperin, 2018). Although academic faculty know they must engage in scholarship, including conducting, publishing, and presenting research, some early career faculty might be unprepared to do so. In this article, we offer recommendations to support faculty at more traditional teaching universities in achieving their goals for scholarly work. We propose the acronym VOICE: (a) be **V**isible, (b) seek out **O**pportunities, (c) have an **I**ntellectual attitude toward growing your skills, (d) consider how you can **C**ontribute to the field, and (e) be **E**arnest in your desire to create high quality academic scholarship. .

KEYWORDS

Faculty, scholarship, teaching university

The responsibilities of university faculty, which generally revolve around the three primary obligations of teaching, scholarship, and service (Mamiseishvili et al., 2016), come with varying degrees of emphasis depending on the type of university. According to the Carnegie Classification system rankings, Research 1 (R1) universities are those in which there is "very high research spending and doctorate production" and Research 2 (R2) universities are those with "high research spending and doctorate production" (American Council on Education, 2025). Faculty at R1 and R2 universities are typically expected to allocate a higher percentage of their workload to research and related mentorship of graduate students as compared to faculty working at master's colleges and universities. Such institutions can be classified as large (M1), medium (M2), or small (M1). These are often referred to as 'teaching institutions' and their faculty are expected to distribute a higher percentage of their workload to teaching. As a result, faculty at teaching institutions usually are not expected to publish as many papers per academic year, or in journals as highly ranked, as faculty at R1 or R2 institutions (Scutelnicu Todoran, 2024). With that said, faculty in every institution must navigate each of the three primary expectations with variance in the percentage of time spent on each priority. It can be challenging for faculty at teaching institutions to balance heavy teaching loads with an expectation for scholarship. In fact, Griffith and Altinay (2020) note that many faculty, regardless of institutional ranking, frequently feel the tension of meeting all expectations, especially when those expectations are not clearly articulated. It is vital that faculty fulfill responsibilities for all three pillars for success, particularly to meet the goal of achieving promotion and tenure. Despite traditional expectations, an increased emphasis has recently been placed on scholarship at both research- and

FIGURE 1: Use Your VOICE Framework



teaching-focused universities (Schimanski & Alperin, 2018).

Historically, scholarship was viewed as a form of engagement that included discovery, integration, application, and teaching and learning (Boyer, 1990). As the landscape of IHE has shifted, faculty have experienced an increase in technology, collaboration, and transparency (Beach et al., 2016). Consequently, the definition of scholarship has also evolved. According to Brown (2012), scholarship is not only about content, but also about the context of scholarly work. In other words, the definition of scholarship looks different depending on the IHE context. Glassick (2000) suggested that scholarship could be defined and assessed by clear goals, preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, clear presentation, and reflective critique. Although the definitions of scholarship differ across IHEs, faculty are expected to excel in whatever form it takes.

Even when early career faculty know they must engage in scholarship (e.g., research, publications, presentations), some are unprepared for all that it entails. In order to support the scholarly goals of faculty at teaching universities, we propose the acronym VOICE: (a) be **V**isible, (b) seek out **O**pportunities, (c) have an **I**ntellectual attitude toward growing your skills, (d) consider how you can **C**ontribute to the field, and (e) be **E**arnest in your desire to create high quality academic scholarship (see Figure 1). This framework was developed by the authors based on our professional experiences and is grounded in the literature around higher education scholarship. Collectively, we have over three decades of experience as special education faculty in teaching-focused universities. We each received our doctorates at R1 universities, where we were taught the importance of scholarship in academic careers. We developed the VOICE framework through frequent conversations and personal reflections about our experiences as we navigated our roles as early career, and now mid-career, special education teacher educators. Throughout this article, we use a series of vignettes to demonstrate how a special education faculty member might use the framework to support their own scholarship.

V: BE VISIBLE

Amid the many responsibilities related to teaching, it can be challenging to find time to engage in scholarship. However, neglecting this component of the faculty role can have negative consequences. We recommend that faculty be diligent about making time for scholarship. Collaborative research is one way to become more visible and help establish a community that promotes accountability for scholarly engagement (Li et al., 2020). Teaching faculty who work at small universities or in small departments may feel like a "party of one" as the only special education faculty member. This can be isolating and make collaboration on scholarship challenging. To combat this, special education faculty should be visible in physical and online spaces that can foster networking with potential collaborators. Thankfully, the use of virtual spaces has increased

IHE faculty's ability to create and sustain professional networks regardless of geographical distance (Trust et al., 2017). Such online professional networks can lead to impactful scholarly collaborations (Schieffer, 2016).

To create more opportunities for visibility, and in turn, collaboration, faculty can also attend annual in-person conferences specific to either teacher education or an area of research interest. We realize that many university faculty have limited funds for professional development or face other travel-related restrictions. In those cases, we suggest creative funding solutions, such as writing conference funds into grant proposal budgets, serving on the conference board, or exploring online conferences that offer meaningful networking sessions. Conference attendance is a well-utilized networking opportunity for IHE faculty in a variety of fields (McClements et al., 2024), including the field of education. To boost networking opportunities, consistent conference attendance, ideally every year, helps to establish a visible presence in that professional space. Although the specific choice of conference will vary, it is important for early career faculty to find a professional "home" at a conference they can attend regularly in order to build a strong network in special education.

In addition to attending sessions to broaden knowledge, conference attendees should make a diligent effort to connect with others in the field, including both familiar and unfamiliar colleagues. Networking at conferences can take many forms, but attending or presenting poster sessions and roundtables can allow faculty to naturally engage in conversation with others. These presentation formats lend themselves well to one-on-one or small group discussions around the topic of the presentation. Conversations about shared research and scholarship interests can spark exciting opportunities to collaborate. During poster sessions and roundtables, it is helpful to ask questions about the presenter's work and, when appropriate, share relevant personal information and research efforts related to the topic. If the opportunity arises, either a presenter or an attendee might express interest in future collaboration.

Another great way to network at conferences is by finding a subgroup, such as a caucus or special interest group, to foster more personalized connections. Attending the conference organization's business meetings and any highlighted sessions for a subgroup will provide additional information about its goals and objectives. Although individuals might have different comfort levels with joining and engaging in a smaller group, networking opportunities exist for both introverts and extroverts. First, an introduction goes a long way, even if only to one or two new colleagues. Low-risk, low-involvement options include signing up for a subgroup's newsletter or social media page, which can provide valuable information about opportunities and collaborations. For those looking to jump in more deeply, volunteers are almost always needed and welcomed. Initially, this might include assisting the group with one-time tasks, but eventually, volunteerism could grow into a leadership position within the subgroup. Volunteering for such a role can help faculty connect with others with shared interests and further facilitate potential collaborative scholarship.

Dr. Baker is a second-year assistant professor of special education at a small teaching college in a rural community. She teaches 12 credit hours per semester and has a total of eight distinct course preparations each academic year. During her first year in her position, she focused on teaching. She advocated for teaching the same courses during her second year to reduce the time required for preparation and allow more time for scholarship. Dr. Baker's university will provide funding for her to attend one conference, so she selects one focused on special education teacher preparation. While at the conference, she attends all scheduled events for early career faculty, as well as sessions related to her areas of research interest. At each event, she talks to other attendees and shares her desire to find collaborators for research. By the time the conference ends, she has connected with a group of early career faculty. They have already scheduled a Zoom meeting for the following week to outline plans for a collaborative research project regarding Universal Design for Learning in inclusive classrooms. As her second year as a faculty member progresses, Dr. Baker and her new network conduct this research study and are able to present their research findings at the same conference the following year.

In addition to conference attendance, or when travel funding is unavailable, it is vital that teaching faculty find other networking opportunities. Many professional organizations host virtual events throughout the academic year. These might include webinars, policy information meetings, book clubs, Sip and Chats, writing retreats, professional learning communities, or other virtual meetings. Whenever possible, attend these events. Participation in these virtual communities assists faculty in identifying avenues for collaboration and continuing their own professional development within the field (Trust et al., 2017). In our experience, there are often only a few dozen people in attendance, which allows ample opportunity for conversation and networking. Seasoned and tenured faculty could share many stories about the scholarly projects that have arisen from such networking events. Most recently, two of the authors participated in a book club; in one of the final meetings, the attendees discussed a specific aspect of the book and designed two research projects and a practitioner

manuscript based on that topic. While scholarship was not the intent of the book club, being visible in that space led to an opportunity for scholarship.

O: SEEK OUT OPPORTUNITIES

The second strategy to increase scholarly success is to intentionally seek out opportunities for collaborative work and mentorship. Mentorship is a relationship between two parties in which both individuals benefit. Typically, one individual is considered an expert on a topic and is willing to share their knowledge, while the second individual learns from the expert (Booker, 2023). However, this relationship can also flow in reverse. Newer faculty often have a level of excitement and drive that can reenergize a long-standing faculty member with decades of experience in the field. Those new to scholarship should keep an eye and ear out for potential mentors who share their research interests and could offer support with learning the academic research and subsequent publishing process. This mentor might be a colleague from their own institution or someone they connected with at a conference or other professional event. Some professional organizations also offer official mentoring processes to match early career faculty with more established researchers in the field. Within any mentorship relationship, early career faculty should request opportunities to publish with their mentor in some capacity as they learn the scholarship process. In an ideal world, one faculty member would have multiple mentors who can each support unique aspects of their scholarly journey. Whether independently or through an organization, having a mentor will serve a new faculty member well as they develop their own research agenda and scholarly work.

Collaborative opportunities can also include writing chapters for edited books or articles for special journal issues. Information about these publishing avenues is often shared through professional organizations and at conferences, which is another great reason to get involved. Often, calls for book chapters or special issue articles are accompanied by a writing template to guide the manuscript. Occasionally, editors might pair up authors interested in writing on the same topic, thus providing an opportunity for a new collaboration. Additionally, submitting work for special issues or edited books can reduce the time authors need to spend looking for a suitable journal in which to publish.

For academic publishing in general, faculty should take time to learn and understand the expectations for a specific journal or publisher. Most journals include specific information for authors along with their submission guidelines on the journal website. Furthermore, numerous manuscripts, both from the field of education and the broader academy, are available to support faculty in the writing process itself (e.g. Markelz & Riden, 2022; Phillips & Barker, 2021; Quinn & Rush, 2009; Saracho, 2013).

Finally, it is critical for early career faculty to protect their time and avoid allowing their research agenda to drift into unrelated topics. Once a faculty member makes it known that they desire to write and collaborate with others, they may receive ample invitations for scholarly partnerships. In some cases, they will find themselves with more opportunities than they have time in the day. Do not say 'yes' to every writing opportunity that comes your way. Instead, be choosy and select the projects that most align with your career goals, research interests, and time constraints.

As Dr. Baker and her colleagues prepare to present their research at the conference, they begin looking for avenues in which to publish that work. Dr. Baker sees an advertisement for a special journal issue that is directly related to Universal Design for Learning in the K-12 classroom. She presents the opportunity to her colleagues, and they work together to develop and submit an article that shares their research and meets the guidelines for the issue.

I: INTELLECTUAL ATTITUDE TOWARD GROWING YOUR SKILLS

Often, IHE faculty are inquisitive people who enjoy engagement in lifelong learning. Scholarship must be approached the same way, with intellectual attitudes and a desire to grow in one's knowledge. Researching, writing, and publishing are skills that must be learned and refined over the course of a career. There are several ways that faculty can achieve this. First, ask for help from other, more established researchers in the field of education. Earlier, the importance of mentorship was discussed. While advice and feedback from a mentor will be invaluable, this should not be the only person from whom a faculty member seeks advice about scholarship. Meetings, social events, and conversations with other researchers are all opportunities to develop understanding, even if it is asking a single question about scholarly activity. In addition, some professional organizations host social media groups or other virtual ways to connect. Even if an individual does not feel comfortable asking a question, reading and listening to others can still be a powerful way to take in advice from experts in the field. Common questions asked in these types of online groups might include *"Does anyone have a recommendation for a peer-reviewed article on using assistive technology to teach spelling to children with disabilities?"* or *"Can anyone recommend a good journal for publishing a research study that falls into the category of scholarship of teaching and learning?"* Whatever the platform or interaction, the ultimate goal should be an exchange of knowledge and information.

TABLE 1: Resources to Grow Your Scholarship

REFERENCE	DESCRIPTION
American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association 2020: The official guide to APA style* (7th ed.). Author.	This comprehensive guide for writing, formatting, and citing scholarly work is used across academic disciplines, including general and special education. It provides guidelines for structuring papers, including the use of headings, tables, figures, and reference lists, to ensure consistency and professionalism. The manual emphasizes ethical writing practices, such as avoiding bias in language and properly crediting sources to maintain academic integrity.
Belcher, W. L. (2009). *Writing your journal article in 12 weeks: A guide to academic publishing success.* Sage Publications.	This book is a practical, step-by-step guide designed to help scholars transform their research into publishable journal articles. It addresses critical aspects of academic writing, including selecting a journal, organizing content, revising drafts, and responding to feedback. The book provides a clear framework and structured weekly tasks, empowering writers to navigate the academic publishing process with confidence and efficiency.
Lynn, T. G., Farnan, S. M., Moore, A. M., & Rueter, J. A. (2024). Flourishing in academia: A collaborative writing team approach for higher education faculty. *The Journal of Advancing Education Practice, 5*(2).	This article articulates the benefits of collaborative writing for academic success. The authors detail how structured teamwork enhances productivity, promotes accountability, and reduces the isolation often experienced in academic writing. Collaborative writing is introduced as a method for skill development and goal achievement within a supportive professional community. Practical strategies and examples can easily be replicated in the reader's own collaborative work.
Silva, P. J. (2019). *How to write a lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing.* APA LifeTools.	This book offers advice for academics looking to improve their writing productivity. It emphasizes the importance of setting writing schedules, creating realistic goals, and overcoming common barriers such as procrastination and perfectionism. Silva debunks myths about writing habits and provides practical strategies for maintaining consistency, tracking progress, and balancing writing with other responsibilities. With its humorous tone and actionable tips, the book serves as a motivational and practical resource for anyone aiming to enhance their academic writing output.

Advice may come from mentorship relationships, individual conversations, or social media. In addition, a major source of feedback results from submitting a manuscript to a journal. Authors should expect to receive feedback in the form of peer reviews and editor comments. All such feedback supports growth in research and writing skills. While some of this feedback may feel harsh at times, authors should approach it with humility and an understanding that reviewers desire to offer support and advice.

Early career IHE faculty should also be diligent about engaging with current literature on scholarship itself. This includes reading articles, books, and other materials about research and scholarship as well as attending webinars, conference sessions, and other in-person and virtual presentations. See Table 1 for a summary of resources to enhance scholarship. These resources can often be accessed through university libraries. Faculty may also consult with department chairs about available funds to purchase resources or attend conferences.

A final word related to an intellectual attitude is that of experiencing rejection and discouragement. The reality is that scholarship is hard and can be disheartening. Like anyone learning a new skill, no one starts as an expert. Be willing to fail. You will have manuscripts rejected and you will receive harsh feedback from peer reviewers. This is part of the process and is experienced by even the most established and well-respected researchers. Do not take it personally and learn to focus rejections as opportunities to improve your scholarship for another outlet.

A few months after submitting their manuscript, Dr. Baker and her colleagues receive an email from the journal with an article rejection, but the opportunity to revise and resubmit. The comments from the reviewers request significant changes to the manuscript. Dr. Baker begins to feel dismayed about the quality of her work. While having lunch with a tenured faculty member at her university, Dr. Baker mentions the rejection letter and states that she is not sure she can even address all the requested changes, so she wonders if it is worth her time to resubmit. Her colleague shares stories of her own manuscript rejections, followed by the eventual success stories of each of those articles. She encourages Dr. Baker to put the reviewer comments aside for a few days and then return to tackle the work before submitting a revised manu-

FIGURE 2: Example of Group Meeting Norms and Sample Agenda for Collaborative Scholarship

Meeting Norms

1. Be fully present.
2. Be prepared.
3. Be mindful of others.
4. Be mindful of self.
5. Be mindful of your workspace.

Collaborative Writing: Meeting Agenda

Date:

Present:

Absent:

Time/Activity:

5-10 minutes	Catch-up: Personal + Professional News
5-10 minutes	Announcements related to project
5-10 minutes	Share goals for work time
60-90 minutes	Work time
10-15 minutes	Share accomplishments
	Confirm/set next meeting time
	Assign To Do items and person responsible, as necessary

To Do Items:

- Draft cover letter for submission (Author 1)
- Check references (Author 2)
- Proofread the final draft (Author 3)
- Verify submission guidelines (Author 4)

script. The manuscript is later accepted and published, becoming Dr. Baker's first scholarly work as a university faculty member.

C: CONSIDER HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE FIELD

A primary goal of special education faculty is to prepare future teachers and make contributions to the field outside of our own IHE and community. Scholarship is the means by which we can make this impact by establishing a research agenda that connects all aspects of scholarly work. First, to launch a research agenda successfully, the faculty member should articulate both short-term and long-term goals and writing plans in a focused area of scholarship. This does not mean that projects unrelated to the research agenda cannot be completed, but the research agenda items must be the top priority.

When considering scholarly contributions, faculty can use several questions to guide their work. First, ask yourself, *"What do I know, and what is my expertise?"* For many early career faculty, their dissertation topic is a strong indicator of an area of expertise. Consider ways this research can be shared with both the special education academic community and classroom teachers. This may include plans for one or more research articles, as well as practitioner pieces on the topic of a dissertation. Finally, think about how the work can be expanded through additional research projects, as appropriate and relevant to your current faculty role.

Secondly, ask yourself, *"Where do my passions lie in the field of special education, and who shares those same passions?"* Passions and expertise are likely to be aligned, though this might not be the case for everyone. As one's role in their IHE, professional organizations, and as a faculty member expand, their interests might change or develop tangentially. A good way to zero in on areas of pursuit is to make a list of broad areas of scholarly interest along with specific educational questions to answer. Then, begin thinking about others in the field who publish scholarship in those areas. This path will likely include reading and studying recent special education journal articles and looking at presenter lists from recent conferences. While it may feel daunting, reaching out to others who share your passions can open the door for discussions about the potential for collaboration. Some IHE faculty who work in teaching institutions find it most fruitful to seek out other teaching faculty members who share their scholarly passions. However, colleagues in research-focused institutions or positions should not be excluded or ruled out as collaborators.

When launching these collaborations, always begin by discussing professional expectations and the role of scholarship in your career. The group should identify a team leader to take on the primary responsibility for identifying the primary objective of the project, recruiting other team members, leading key aspects of the project, setting the timeline for completion, and clarifying roles during collaboration. Expectations and roles should be clearly defined for each person

TABLE 2: Journals on Action Research and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Title	Description	URL
Active Learning in Higher Education	Research related to active learning strategies for teaching and learning in higher education	https://journals.sagepub.com/home/alh
American Journal of Education	Research that encourages dialogue between researchers and policy makers and addresses key issues to the field of education broadly	https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/aje/current
Applied Measurement in Education	Research that connects theory and practice and addresses contemporary measurement needs and challenges	https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/hame20
Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education	Research related to the practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education	https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/caeh20/current
College Teaching	Interdisciplinary articles related to instructional practices	https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/vcol20
International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning	Research about the scholarship of teaching and learning as it applies to higher education	https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/
Journal of Scholarship and Practice	Research for school and district administrators	https://www.aasa.org/publications/journal-of-scholarship-and-practice
Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship	Research focused on children and youth with disabilities authored by graduate students and early career faculty	https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/josea/
Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research	PK-12 and teacher preparation-focused action research	https://newprairiepress.org/networks/

before getting started, especially when a new faculty member does not yet have expertise with scholarly processes and activities. It is important to remain realistic. As a contributor, an early career faculty member should consider their other commitments and honestly convey the amount of time they anticipate contributing to the project. With these time commitments in mind, the team leader can more effectively determine roles and responsibilities among collaborators.

Once a shared understanding of expectations and the role of scholarship has been established, the scholarly team should set regular times to discuss the project and/or write together in person or via videoconferencing. Such a schedule aids in productivity and accountability. During the first meeting, establish meeting norms to lay a solid foundation for the project. For example, the following norms, used in the third author's co-taught class, were created and agreed upon by both instructors in order to establish a classroom environment conducive to productivity.

Be fully present: Limit distractions and focus on identified goals.

Be prepared: Have what is needed to complete required tasks during the work session (e.g. refill water bottle or coffee mug prior to the meeting, have a snack available).

Be mindful of others: Use reflective listening skills; be willing to compromise; be punctual; and alert the team if missing a meeting, leaving early, or arriving late.

Be mindful of self: Be aware of mood/emotional state and how ideas may come across to team members.

Be mindful of your workspace: Organize your space and create the ambience you need to be productive.

These same norms can also apply to a collaborative scholarly relationship.

In addition to establishing group meeting norms, create a template to keep documentation from meetings (see Figure 2 for an example). An agenda with detailed notes maintains a record of discussions and serves as a reminder of what the group accomplished during the

previous meeting.

Lastly, ask yourself, *"How can my scholarly work align with my teaching?"* For teaching faculty, much of the workload is dedicated to preparing courses, instructing students, and assessing learning. It can be easy to see this work as separate from scholarship. However, this should be a bidirectional process where scholarship informs teaching and vice versa. One avenue through which teaching can be aligned with scholarship is by conducting research on effective or innovative teacher preparation. A teacher educator might ask themselves what they want or need to know in order to be more effective in the classroom and to better support students. This may include scholarly projects focusing on instructional practices or assessment methods. Much of this research will likely fall under the categories of either action research or the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). There are several peer-reviewed journals that specifically publish these types of studies. Table 2 provides a list of journals that might be appropriate outlets for publishing scholarly work on teaching.

After the publication of their manuscript in the special issue, Dr. Baker's writing colleagues suggest several other potential research projects on a variety of special education topics. Dr. Baker knows that she does not have the time to participate in multiple projects at once and must decide which research is most appropriate for her to pursue at this time. One of her colleagues suggests investigating the impact of using the Universal Design for Learning framework to develop teacher preparation coursework. Because she recognizes that this research can be conducted within her own courses and that it aligns with her desired research agenda around UDL, Dr. Baker chooses to partner with the colleague developing this research study.

A second strategy for integrating scholarship into a heavier teaching load is to write practitioner articles, especially if those articles can later be used in a faculty member's own courses. A practitioner article is simply a manuscript that aims to bridge the research-to-practice gap. These articles offer a brief overview of research on a specific topic, followed by guidance for teachers on using one or more research-based strategies in their own classroom. Practitioner articles often include vignettes or case studies that demonstrate practical application of the teaching practice. Popular practitioner journals in special education include *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *Beyond Behavior*, and *Young Exceptional Children*. Other journals, such as *Journal of Special Education Technology* and *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, publish practitioner articles in addition to research articles. When looking for a journal, early career faculty should consider the aims and purposes of a journal to ensure a good fit between the outlet and the manuscript.

Finally, two cautions are worth noting. First, many faculty members experience the common challenge of imposter syndrome (IS) from time to time (Rickett & Thompson, 2024). Feelings of IS have been linked to a decrease in well-being, job satisfaction, and self-assessed job performance (Swaidan & Jabbour Al Maalouf, 2025). As a teaching faculty member, you cannot expect to publish at the same rate as colleagues working in research universities, nor as frequently as colleagues with more experience and larger academic networks. We highly recommend avoiding comparing your scholarship to that of others. Second, for some faculty members, research and writing are a desirable component of the job, perhaps preferred over teaching and other responsibilities. For teaching-focused faculty, we caution against neglecting other job components to focus on scholarship, as this may carry negative consequences.

E: BE EARNEST IN YOUR DESIRE TO CREATE HIGH QUALITY ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP

The final part of the VOICE acronym is to be earnest about your work. An earnest attitude might be demonstrated through a variety of actions. First, make writing a priority. Silva (2018) encourages scheduling writing time on a calendar and treating that calendar item like any other appointment, class, or meeting. When you intentionally plan time to write, you are likely to make a greater commitment, follow through, and meet your scholarly goals. We have seen academics do this in a variety of ways:

One author starts every workday with 15 minutes of writing and completes one small writing task each day (e.g. write one paragraph, find one reference). She blocks off one longer stretch on her calendar each week for more intensive writing and completing larger tasks. She finds that daily writing helps keep the project fresh in her mind so that she does not waste time during writing sessions trying to remember what she is working on.

Another author maintains a spreadsheet with tabs to keep track of current projects, ideas for the future, and implements several tips from Silva (2018). For example, one tab is a log of the date, time, project, and task for each writing session. When possible, she schedules Zoom calls with collaborators to have dedicated time with nothing else interfering. Otherwise, she marks off times for scholarship on three to four days per week as an appointment on her work calendar. This shows as an unavailable time when colleagues search her calendar for meeting times, keeping that time sacred for accomplishing scholarly

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tasks. Additionally, she maps out a tentative timeline for each project on a file folder to increase the opportunity for projects to make steady progress toward completion. She places relevant print materials in the folder for easy access during writing sessions.

A third author started out by writing whenever she could, usually on a Friday after she was caught up with most of her other job duties. Recently, she found this system was not working well and was limiting her productivity, so she set up a weekly time to meet virtually with her co-author(s) to write. She found this to be helpful, especially because the co-author's presence allowed them to talk through challenges together instead of waiting to respond to comments in a shared document. She also has a whiteboard in her office that lists her teaching responsibilities and scholarly projects (e.g., works in progress, manuscripts under review, grants, book or chapter proposals, articles in press). These lists help her see at a quick glance what needs to be worked on.

Another way that scholars can demonstrate earnestness is through collaborative work. As noted earlier, educational research is generally a collaborative effort. Faculty members need to work with others to be strong scholars in the field. During those collaborations, it is important to demonstrate reliability as a co-author, completing agreed-upon tasks within agreed-upon timeframes. When you are known to be a reliable co-author, more opportunities for collaborative scholarship will inevitably follow in the future. Keep in mind when demonstrating earnestness that it might be necessary to pass on opportunities when they do not align with personal interests or research agendas. You can be truthful, sincere, and earnest by saying "thank you for the opportunity" without making a commitment.

As she moves forward in her career as a faculty member, Dr. Baker takes on increased responsibilities at her university and begins preparing to apply for promotion and tenure. Because she wants to be more efficient in her scholarly work, she begins hosting monthly writing retreats for other faculty at her university. These sessions provide dedicated time for research and writing, offering accountability and a disruption-free environment. Before each retreat, Dr. Baker creates a schedule for herself with specific tasks to complete and a timeline for completing each one. She finds that this system helps her use her time well. By the end of her fourth year as a special education faculty member, she has published several articles and has more under review and in progress. After meeting with her dean, Dr. Baker feels confident that her level of scholarship, paired with her teaching and service tasks, has set her up for success as she applies for promotion and tenure. Based on her dean's statements that she is "more than qualified" for promotion to tenured associate professor, Dr. Baker feels that her use of the VOICE framework over the past few years was essential to her success as a faculty member and a scholar at a teaching university.

CONCLUSION

Sharing your VOICE is an important part of being a professor. However, we also know that it can be the most daunting task you take on. While many of us are eager to share our knowledge of special education, we do not always know where or how to start. By adhering to the VOICE framework, early career faculty can begin the scholarly process with people who are there to support your endeavors. As mentioned earlier, we encourage finding people

who share common interests as well as establishing a solid network or writing group that you can rely on. For us, what began as informal, conversational meetings during the pandemic evolved into a productive writing group, resulting in the publication of several articles and book chapters, as well as multiple joint presentations. While we also collaborate with others, we are able to use this group as a place of encouragement and as a network of potential partners for projects. Don't forget: Your VOICE is essential to furthering your career and the field of special education!

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A Field Supervisor's Blueprint for Optimal Distance Supervision Experiences

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ABSTRACT

High-quality field experiences are one of the most critical components of effective special education teacher preparation, with research showing they directly impact teacher effectiveness and student outcomes (Bussey & Lay, 2023; Dunst et al., 2019). As teacher preparation programs evolve to meet changing demands, new models of field supervision are emerging, offering promising benefits while introducing new challenges. This article examines how thoughtfully structured field supervision, supported by technology and collaboration, can enhance the quality of feedback, promote reflective practice, and improve outcomes for special education teacher candidates. A practical framework is presented to help university field supervisors guide special education teacher candidates through a successful, well-supported hybrid field experience. These insights aim to inform programs serving candidates in rural or remote areas who seek to elevate the impact of their field supervision practices.

KEYWORDS

Educational technology, field experiences, hybrid field supervision, special education teacher preparation, video-based feedback

Mae, a field supervisor for a special education teacher preparation program at a large 4-year public university, had become accustomed to using a hybrid approach to support special education teacher candidates (SPED TCs) during their field experiences at PreK-12 partner schools. The era of exclusive in-person field supervision experiences was a thing of the past, especially after COVID-19 and the recent budget cuts made to her department. To complement the in-person practicum, Mae's program used a video-based learning platform that allowed SPED TCs to record and upload teaching videos for feedback.

Although Mae saw the clear benefits of blending in-person and virtual field observation experiences, there were also unexpected challenges. Without formal training or clear guidance on how to use the video-based learning platform, some SPED TCs struggled with the technological aspects, such as recording and uploading their videos with clear audio, positioning the camera to capture a full view of the instruction or classroom, and minimizing student distractions during recording. These challenges brought forth added stressors that disrupted the field experience and made it difficult for Mae to assess SPED TCs' instructional performance adequately. Mae was certain that there had to be a more proactive and structured way to set SPED TCs up for a successful hybrid field experience, which would also allow her to assess their instructional practices effectively.

The educational experiences of children with disabilities are shaped by the expertise of their teachers, which is determined by the quality of their teacher preparation programs (Bussey & Lay, 2023). As emphasized in a meta-synthesis conducted by Dunst et al. (2019), field experience with supervision from a university field supervisor is a platform for teacher candidates (TCs) to acquire instructional skills and

is the most critical factor in effectively preparing future teachers. Dunst et al. concluded that spending more time in field supervision experiences resulted in better quality teaching and improved student outcomes. Field supervision experiences are also crucial in boosting new teachers' commitment to remain in the field (Grobart & Zepp, 2024; Smith, 2018). While quality field supervision experiences remain a pillar of many special education teacher preparation programs (TPPs), recent political trends in higher education and calls to integrate technology into the field supervision experiences of TCs may compel these programs to reevaluate traditional field supervisory models that rely primarily on in-person observations.

Recent political shifts, particularly billions of dollars in proposed budget cuts to public and higher education programs tied to anti-Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts (PBS News, 2025), have resulted in layoffs of university and public-school personnel involved in teacher preparation, as well as disruptions to teacher field experience programs (Lieberman, 2025). These political shifts are expected to impede special education teacher preparation efforts and exacerbate the ongoing special education teacher shortage. The combined impact of financial pressures and guidance from accrediting bodies, such as recommendations to incorporate annotated virtual observations (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, n.d.), and the CEEDAR Center's endorsement of e-coaching as essential (Dieker et al., 2014), underscores the need to shift from traditional supervision models to more innovative, technologically-enhanced supervisory approaches that offer instructional benefits and potential cost-savings.

Traditional field supervision models primarily rely on in-person observations and feedback (Callaway-Cole & Kimble, 2021), requiring SPED TCs to reflect on their teaching based on memory recall (Van Boxtel, 2017). These traditional field experiences can also limit the frequency of field supervisor contact, particularly for TCs placed in diverse or geographically dispersed areas (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017). The logistical complexities of scheduling in-person visits and the reliance on memory-based reflection can limit the effectiveness of feedback and hinder TC growth (Van Boxtel, 2017). Hybrid supervision models can address the inefficiencies of traditional in-person approaches by reducing costs (Schmidt et al., 2015), saving time, and enhancing the quality of candidate reflections (Van Boxtel, 2017). Hybrid models also foster more frequent field supervisor interactions and provide more timely and useful feedback for TCs (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017).

Distance supervision, which involves using technology to supervise TCs across locations (Schmidt et al., 2015), offers significant financial and time-saving advantages compared to traditional in-person methods. When supporting SPED TCs in remote areas, Schmidt et al. (2015) found that over 4 years, distance supervision costs were substantially less (under $200,000) than traditional supervision costs (over $650,000). Similarly, Van Boxtel (2017) observed that field supervisors saved approximately 9 hours in travel time and around $185 in mileage reimbursement over two quarters. While the cost of the distance supervision platform per person was about the same as the mileage savings, the time saved was reallocated to providing high-quality support to TCs, such as lesson plan coaching, and to advancing the field supervisor's tenure and promotion responsibilities (e.g., research and service). Van Boxtel further demonstrated that embedding distance supervision into traditional field supervision models could reduce the cost of hiring adjunct faculty by nearly $4,000 over two quarters. Additionally, the annotation feature allowed supervisors to provide more precise feedback, enabling TCs to review annotated video recordings for deeper reflection and increased instructional confidence. As exemplified in these studies, hybrid supervision models that integrate distance technology offer some compelling advantages over exclusive in-person supervision. These hybrid models are particularly well-suited for special education TPPs facing budget cuts, serving rural or remote areas, or navigating complex logistical challenges (Schmidt et al., 2015), such as dense urban traffic or widespread island communities, like those found in Hawai‘i.

Research consistently shows that hybrid approaches to field supervision can yield results comparable to, or even exceeding, traditional in-person approaches in preparing teachers (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017; Smith et al., 2020; Van Boxtel, 2017; Vu & Fisher, 2021). Moreover, leading scholars have specifically recommended embedding distance supervision strategies into field supervision for their positive impact on the learning opportunities of preservice special educators (Billingsley & Scheuermann, 2014). These approaches are also recognized as cost-effective and efficient, particularly in enhancing the quality of special education teacher preparation for candidates supporting high-need students in rural or remote areas (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2015; Van Boxtel, 2017).

Despite this growing body of evidence supporting the efficacy and benefits of hybrid field supervision approaches in special education teacher preparation, additional guidance is needed to help programs effectively navigate the tech-

nological and communication challenges (Paulsen & Schmidt-Crawford, 2017; Smith et al., 2020) and to intentionally adapt traditional field supervision practices to virtual formats. To build on the existing literature, we will outline strategies to address technological barriers and provide practical guidance for intentionally implementing hybrid practices to enhance traditional supervision approaches in special education TPPs. This work is especially relevant for programs operating under budget constraints or supporting TCs in remote or logistically challenging settings. To lay the foundation for these strategies, we will first outline the core elements of field experiences for SPED TCs. Then, we will examine the hybrid supervision model, presenting actionable strategies to potentially improve traditional supervision methods for special education TPPs interested in adopting or refining hybrid practices.

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF FIELD EXPERIENCES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER CANDIDATES

Field experiences include various activities, such as TCs observing experienced teachers and delivering instruction in authentic classroom settings (Cirillo et al., 2020). Typical field experiences that are impactful hinge on three active participants working together, including the preservice SPED TC, the school-level cooperating teacher, and the university field supervisor (Bussey & Lay, 2023). Field supervisors and cooperating teachers are instrumental in developing SPED TCs, as they ideally collaborate to coach and assess how SPED TCs' skills manifest in realistic learning environments and how they critically reflect on their teaching practices.

University supervisors help to prepare SPED TCs for a multitude of roles and responsibilities in the field of special education, which may include collaborating with stakeholders, designing lesson plans, applying effective classroom and behavior management strategies, utilizing evidence-based instructional practices for students with disabilities, demonstrating professionalism, and developing and implementing individualized education programs. The field supervisor serves as the university's representative, providing observation, support, and guidance to the student teacher through reflective teaching practices. (Bussey & Lay, 2023). Additionally, the field supervisor evaluates how the SPED TC bridges theory to practice by guiding them in applying coursework from their program to the real-world field of special education, where the SPED TC works directly with students who have disabilities (Bussey & Lay, 2023; Grobart & Zepp, 2024). Ultimately, the field supervisor works alongside the cooperating teacher to provide (a) a model of being an effective special education teacher and (b) ample practice opportunities to implement specially designed instruction.

SPED TCs have unique strengths and needs, and field supervisors help them capitalize on and refine these through tailored support, much like special educators create individualized goals for their students (Bussey & Lay, 2023). Field experiences are essential for developing quality special education teachers (Grobart & Zepp, 2024), making the approach to field supervision imperative. Various approaches to field supervision exist, each offering unique benefits.

INTEGRATING TWO MODELS OF FIELD SUPERVISION TO FORM THE HYBRID APPROACH

There are two forms of field supervision experiences used in the hybrid approach. First is the traditional in-person approach, where the field supervisor comes to the SPED TC's applied learning environment in the host classroom and observes them engaging with students in real-world instructional contexts (Callaway-Cole & Kimble, 2021). Ideally, some of that in-person time is reserved after the lesson for the SPED TC to debrief and consult with their field supervisor and cooperating teacher about how the lesson went (Grobart & Zepp, 2024). Second is the distance supervision approach, where the field supervisor virtually visits the SPED TC's host classroom by observing a live or recorded version of the SPED TC implementing a lesson through a video-based learning platform. Similar to the traditional approach, best practice is for the lesson observation to be followed by a three-way lesson observation debrief between the SPED TC, the field supervisor, and the cooperating teacher (Smith, 2018). However, unlike traditional approaches, distance supervision lesson observation debriefs can be conducted using video-based learning and assessment platforms. These can include time-stamped written feedback from the field supervisor and cooperating teacher, along with reflective comments from the SPED TC embedded throughout the recorded lesson. Additionally, some platforms support asynchronous written and video exchanges between the SPED TC, field supervisor, and cooperating teacher, facilitating ongoing collaboration and feedback (GoReact, 2025a).

A hybrid approach provides SPED TCs with field experiences that combine traditional in-person and distance supervision approaches. Both distance supervision and traditional in-person supervision have their advantages and disadvantages. However, combined, they can help offset the challenges of relying exclusively on one approach.

Advantages of the Hybrid Approach to Field Supervision Experiences

Combining traditional in-person and distance supervision approaches can significantly benefit TCs (Vu & Fisher,

TABLE 1: Comparison of Hybrid vs. In-Person Field Experiences

ASPECT	HYBRID FIELD EXPERIENCE	IN-PERSON FIELD EXPERIENCE
Observation Flexibility	Flexible scheduling: Videos can be reviewed multiple times	Requires travel and scheduling coordination
Feedback Timing	Allows time-stamped, asynchronous, or synchronous video-based feedback; feedback can be provided immediately after the lesson	Real-time feedback is possible during or immediately after the lesson
Access & Efficiency	Fosters frequent contact and accessibility between all stakeholders across multiple locations, including remote and rural placements	Limited by travel time and geographic reach
Rapport Building	Less personal interaction may reduce relationship-building opportunities	In-person interaction supports stronger rapport
Reflective Practice	All stakeholders can rewatch and reflect on lessons independently and/or collectively	All stakeholders rely on memory, notes, or verbal feedback
Performance Anxiety	Reduced SPED TC anxiety without the physical presence of the observer	SPED TC may feel increased pressure during instruction with an observer present
Technology Dependence & Proficiency	Requires access to reliable video and audio platforms, along with resources and time dedicated to developing technology proficiency	Minimal reliance on technology and related training resources during live observation
Authenticity of Teaching	Captures more natural instruction; reduces observer influence (Hawthorne effect)	Teacher and student behavior may be influenced by observer presence (Hawthorne effect)

Note. SPED TC = Special Education Teacher Candidate

2021). Contrary to the perception of virtual learning being less prestigious than traditional in-person instruction (Hodges et al., 2020), TCs who participated in virtual field supervision performed the same academically as those who participated in traditional in-person supervision (Vu & Fisher, 2021). Furthermore, most participants in Smith et al.'s (2020) study preferred a mixed approach of in-person and distance supervision rather than using either method individually, reporting that this combination enriched the quality of their field experiences. Table 1 highlights key differences between the hybrid and in–person supervision approaches, illustrating the distinct advantages and limitations of each.

The ability for SPED TCs to record and upload lessons to distance supervision platforms has several advantages. First, field supervision in rural settings can be costly and time-consuming, as field supervisors often spend significant time traveling (Schmidt et al., 2015); thus, utilizing innovative technology such as video-based lesson platforms for field supervision presents a promising solution to minimize costs, travel time, and supervision scheduling (Lynn et al., 2022; Smith, 2018). This approach may also be beneficial in non-rural settings, where field supervisors, who often manage large caseloads of SPED TCs (Bussey & Lay, 2023), oversee multiple teacher candidates across diverse geographical locations.

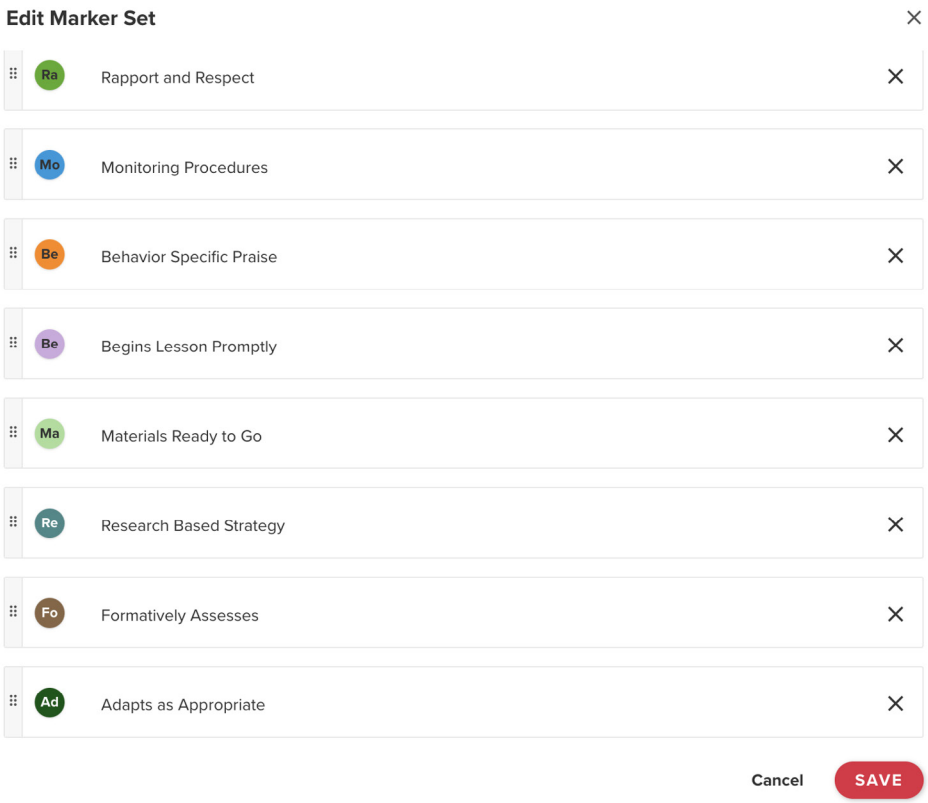
Second, unforeseen weather anomalies, health pandemics (e.g., COVID-19; Cirillo et al., 2020), and the complex medical needs of some students with disabilities or field supervisors can jeopardize the feasibility of traditional in-person field experiences. Some SPED TCs' field experiences may involve working with students with disabilities who are immunocompromised and have extensive medical needs. Some students with disabilities who have complex medical needs may receive skilled nursing services and require strict visitor policies that prevent outside visitors, such as field supervisors, from regularly coming to the classroom. There may also be instances where field supervisors need to limit their exposure to groups of people in close quarters due to being immunocompromised, particularly when flu and other illnesses are rampant. Access to distance supervision tools can

mitigate harsh weather patterns or illness susceptibilities that prevent field supervisors from traveling to supervise SPED TCs in person.

Third, video-based lesson and assessment platforms support the development of reflective teaching by enabling SPED TCs to repeatedly review recordings of their instruction, helping them to quickly identify and adjust their teaching practices (Lynn et al., 2022). Learning how to be a reflective special educator involves learning from one's own experiences and is critical to the growth of SPED TCs (Bussey & Lay, 2023). Distance supervision incorporating reflective video analysis can lead to more in-depth reflective comments from TCs during collaborative post-observation discussions, helping them make more informed decisions in future lessons when applying feedback (Kaneko-Marques, 2015). Additionally, it enhances their self-awareness as they identify mannerisms and habits by analyzing the recorded lesson, which they might not have noticed otherwise during a non-recorded in-person observation (Smith, 2018). Video-based lesson and assessment platforms offer unique feedback opportunities when a recorded video of the SPED TC's lesson is uploaded, presenting other features that in-person supervision does not provide.

Video-based learning and assessment platforms enable time-stamped feedback and embedded, personalized written comments from the field supervisor and cooperating teacher at precise moments during a recorded lesson, a feature described as efficient and impactful (Smith, 2018). SPED TCs and supervisors alike reported that this feature significantly enhanced teaching performance by offering targeted, actionable insights aligned with specific teaching behaviors as they occurred**.** Some platforms, such as GoReact, enable users to create and insert prepopulated color-coded markers when providing time-stamped feedback. These markers serve as predefined comments or cues that can be quickly applied at specific moments in the video, aligning with the program's designated criteria (Lynn et al., 2022). For example, if the teaching criteria set by the program are for the SPED TC to use behavior-specific praise or provide opportunities for students to respond, prepopulated color-coded markers could be used to represent these skills (e.g., see Figure 1; Be for behavior-specific praise and Fo for formative assessment or opportunities to respond). Then, when the field supervisor or cooperating teacher observes the SPED TC demonstrating these practices, they can quickly and efficiently insert the Be or Fo marker to highlight effective implementation or indicate where the skill was absent but could have been beneficial, offering immediate and actionable feedback aligned with the lesson's timing. Prepopulating these markers allows field supervisors and cooperating teachers to identify the specific criteria they are assessing in the SPED TC's teaching and provide quality, targeted feedback efficiently at precise times during the lesson.

FIGURE 1: Examples of GoReact Prepopulated Color-Coded Markers Aligned to Field Experience Criteria



An additional useful element of this type of time-stamped feedback on a previously recorded lesson is that it provides a mechanism for non-disruptive feedback (Smith, 2018). This low-profile feedback approach eliminates the need for the field supervisor to be physically present, potentially reducing the Hawthorne effect, which is the tendency for individuals to alter their behavior when they know they are being observed (O'Leary, 2020). In contrast, in-person observations may introduce conditions that unintentionally modify the authenticity of the observed lesson, potentially impacting the natural behavior of the

teacher and students. For example, a student who is aware of the observer's presence may alter their behavior when an observer is present, thereby impacting the flow of the lesson. While not a flawless solution, distance supervision observation methods that involve the SPED TC not disclosing the presence of an observer watching the recording can help reduce the potential for Hawthorne effects (O'Leary, 2020).

Disadvantages of the Hybrid Approach to Field Supervision Experiences

Several challenges exist when using distance supervision platforms and methods. First, the presence of a recording device can distract the students that the SPED TCs are working with (Smith, 2018). Students, particularly those who experience sensory challenges, may be distracted by the novelty of being recorded, which can shift attention away from instruction. This can create additional challenges for the SPED TC during formal observations, which may already involve heightened levels of stress or anxiety.

Second, the distance supervision approach lacks physical human interaction and can hinder the development of collaborative partnerships, potentially leading to a disconnect between the field supervisor and cooperating teacher (Smith et al., 2020). These individuals must collaborate to provide SPED TCs with quality field experiences (Bussey & Lay, 2023). A disconnect between the cooperating teacher and the field supervisor can result in a lack of quality feedback for the SPED TC. Participants in Smith et al.'s (2020) study noted concerns with delayed, disconnected, or nonexistent feedback on the distance supervision platform. Additionally, SPED TCs in the same study highlighted the value of in-person support and interaction with field supervisors, particularly at the beginning and end of their field experiences, to enhance their teaching.

Third, technological challenges can prevent the effective use of video platforms for observations (Smith et al., 2020), which supervisors, TCs, and cooperating teachers might see as an added burden or a new skill to acquire. A lack of training for cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and SPED TCs, insufficient updates on new platform features, and limited access to technical support can create barriers. Additionally, issues such as inadequate test runs, poor camera placement, and insufficient audio can impact the quality of recordings, potentially requiring SPED TCs to redo their lessons. These conditions can cause undue frustration for SPED TCs and field supervisors. Poor-quality videos of the SPED TC's lesson, coupled with limited access to their teaching materials (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, worksheets), can restrict the view of the classroom for field supervisors, not allowing them to get the entire context of the lesson. While distance supervision presents challenges, effective strategies exist to overcome them.

When intentionally structured and designed, distance supervision and learning can be beneficial to TCs. Similar to traditional in-person supervision, distance supervision takes time to design and build in learner support (Hodges et al., 2020; Vu & Fisher, 2021).

Field supervisors, some more than others, may need support in several areas related to distance supervision. With varying digital fluency among field supervisors, it is recommended that teacher preparation programs make the necessary support accessible and available to their faculty; support may include professional development in online teaching pedagogies and video-based lesson platforms or learner management system training (Hodges et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020). When implementing distance technology, programs should consider the time and resources needed to properly train stakeholders on how to set up and use the technology.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: TAKING STEPS FOR OPTIMAL DISTANCE SUPERVISION EXPERIENCES

Mae contemplated how she would navigate a hybrid model of field supervision by balancing a combination of in-person and video-based distance learning strategies, including virtual recordings, digital tools, and evolving technologies. She knew this approach held real promise, especially for expanding access and offering more flexible feedback. But she also recognized that, without structure and planning, the hybrid model could quickly become overwhelming for both her and the SPED TCs. Thus, Mae began mapping out steps grounded in research to ensure that SPED TCs received the support, clarity, and feedback needed to thrive in this new supervision format. Mae's goal was simple but vital to SPED TCs, realizing the full potential of a rich and meaningful field experience.

Step 1: Provide Orientation and Technical Support for Video-Based Learning Platforms

Unlike in-person field supervision, which relies on real-time, in-person observations, hybrid field experiences require additional preparation to ensure that all stakeholders are equipped to engage effectively with technology-based tools. Without this upfront training and planning, technical difficulties can disrupt the observation and feedback process. As a proactive measure against potential technological challenges, field supervisors, SPED TCs, and cooperating teachers should receive training to orient them to the selected video-based learning platform before its use (Smith et al.,

TABLE 2: Tech Prep Checklist: A Blueprint for Prerecorded Virtual Observations

STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL OBSERVATION	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
Record a virtual classroom tour	• Include the classroom layout - show how it supports instruction and students' needs • Share classroom routines established for the students and the teacher
Have access to technological support contacts	• Ensure tech support contacts (email, website, phone) are easily accessible for troubleshooting
Check the recording device for video and audio quality	**Laptop/Mobile device webcam** • Confirm that the video-based learning and assessment platform offers a free recording application for the mobile device **External microphones** • Consider if the distance from the recording device may affect the audio, and adjust accordingly • Record a short test clip to test audio and video quality
Ensure an appropriate camera angle	• Position the recording device to capture the broadest classroom view
Obtain consent to record students	• Confirm parent/guardian consent for all students in the recording • Follow any school policy related to recording students
Acclimate students and remove camera distraction	• Give time for students to adjust to the recording device before starting • Cover the recording screen with dark paper or place the device discreetly to reduce distraction
Upload the video and notify the university field supervisor and cooperating teacher	• Log in to the platform using your teacher preparation program credentials • Locate the correct assignment on the platform • Select and upload the video file, ensuring it meets the size and format requirements • Wait for the upload to finish, then submit and share the video • Notify your university field supervisor and cooperating teacher (e.g., by email) to confirm the video has been uploaded

2020). They should also be regularly updated on new features of the chosen video-based learning platform and have access to technical support contacts for troubleshooting.

Before the semester began, Mae attended a brief training on the video-based learning and assessment platform to learn about new features like enhanced feedback tools and simplified video upload options. Equipped with the confidence to navigate the platform and support her SPED TCs efficiently, Mae led a virtual orientation for her SPED TCs and cooperating teachers, covering video recording and uploading procedures, tech tips on camera placement and audio quality, and quick references for troubleshooting support. During the orientation, Mae shared the "Tech Prep Checklist: A Blueprint for Successful Prerecorded Virtual Observations," as shown in Table 2. The checklist included key steps for setting up the recording environment. While Mae reviewed each step on the checklist, she also answered cooperating teachers' and SPED TCs' questions to ensure they felt comfortable with the video-based learning platform. This early onboarding helped minimize avoidable technical issues and ensured TCs and cooperating teachers were prepared for a seamless start to the practicum, feeling supported and tech-ready.

Step 2: Set Up Prepopulated Markers in Video-Based Learning Platforms

In traditional in-person field supervision, feedback is typically given verbally and or in written notes after an observation. In contrast, hybrid formats also utilize video-based platforms that allow for one-touch feedback through tools like prepopulated, color-coded markers.

Developing these markers based on the criteria SPED TCs must demonstrate during their formal observations can facilitate seamless and efficient feedback (see Figure 1). Although an initial time investment is required to integrate these markers into the platform, their ongoing use will enable field supervisors and co-

operating teachers to efficiently deliver time-stamped feedback, streamlining the feedback process and aligning it with program expectations (Lynn et al., 2022). Additionally, it may help foster a collaborative partnership between the field supervisor and cooperating teacher by supporting the delivery of cohesive, quality feedback that remains aligned with the expected skills while allowing flexibility for open-ended comments. Furthermore, SPED TCs can utilize the markers to evaluate their teaching skills and compare their self-assessment with the feedback provided by their field supervisors and cooperating teachers. This comparison can serve as a valuable foundation for reflective discussions during debriefing and coaching sessions, helping to facilitate the recommended three-way debrief session between SPED TC, the university field supervisor, and school-level cooperating teacher (Smith et al., 2020). When SPED TCs use the markers to self-assess their teaching skills or engage in peer assessment, it can also help them become more familiar with the specific instructional practices they need to demonstrate.

To support more focused feedback and reflection, Mae's program coordinator created and uploaded prepopulated, color-coded markers (e.g., Be: behavior-specific praise; Fo: formative assessment techniques) aligned with key teaching skills into the video-based platform for all SPED TCs, cooperating teachers, and field supervisors to use. Thus, allowing Mae and the cooperating teachers to quickly tag specific teaching moments with time-stamped feedback during lesson reviews. Then, before formal observations began, Mae introduced the markers to SPED TCs and gave them time to practice using the markers with a sample teaching video for future self-assessment opportunities and to deepen their understanding of effective instructional strategies. During lesson debriefing sessions, Mae used the markers to facilitate reflective discussions, ensuring her feedback aligned with the cooperating teachers she partnered with. This approach reinforced core teaching expectations, fostered collaboration among all supervision partners, and helped SPED TCs gain a clearer understanding of high-leverage practices within their classroom and with their students.

Step 3: Equip SPED Teacher Candidates with a Self-Checklist to Practice Recording a Virtual Classroom Tour

In conventional on-site field supervision, field supervisors gain direct situational insight into the classroom environment by being physically present during lessons, but in hybrid formats, video recordings can limit visibility into important contextual elements. To address this, hybrid models offer a unique opportunity for SPED TCs to provide virtual classroom tours, helping field supervisors gain insight into the learning environment before lesson planning and formal observations begin.

To address the potential challenge of video-recorded lessons not fully capturing the context of the lesson or overall classroom setup, supervisors can ask SPED TCs to test the recording and uploading features of the video-based learning platform by conducting a virtual tour of the classroom. This can introduce the classroom setup to the field supervisor ahead of scheduled observations. Simultaneously, the virtual tour allows SPED TCs to critically consider how the learning environment can best support their students, while also enabling them to conduct a test run to identify and resolve potential technological issues before recording a lesson (Smith et al., 2020).

Smith et al. (2020) also encouraged using a self-checklist (see Table 2) for SPED TCs when conducting the practice run to ensure a smooth recording and uploading process. This checklist should be provided to SPED TCs outlining important technological considerations for recording and prompts that offer field supervisors a virtual classroom tour. Prompts for the virtual tour may include: (a) How is the classroom physically arranged? (b) What classroom routines are established for students and teachers?, and (c) How do the physical setup and established classroom routines align with the students' characteristics? These prompts can foster SPED TCs' critical thinking for lesson planning purposes and can be adapted and tailored to meet the expectations of various special education teacher preparation programs.

For the technological preparation, Smith et al. (2020) recommended including several key elements on the checklist to enhance video quality. These include setting up the camera well in advance of the recorded or live lesson, allowing students time to acclimate while ensuring a clear view of the lesson, using an external microphone to improve audio quality, and employing a mechanism (e.g., taping a dark colored sheet of construction paper over the laptop screen when recording) to prevent students from seeing themselves during the recording, thereby minimizing distractions. Checklist recommendations for lighting and framing include positioning the camera to capture the widest possible view of the classroom while maintaining clear audio quality. Having more light in front of the TCs than behind them is also important to avoid shadows and ensure a clearer video image (GoReact, 2025b). Background tips offered by GoReact (2025b) include keeping the area free of clutter and standing in front of a solid-colored background, as some cameras do not record clearly against bright white backdrops. Additionally, depending on school policies and procedures,

another consideration to include on the checklist is for SPED TCs to confirm all students featured in the recorded video have video consent release forms on file with parent or guardian approval.

When completing the self-checklist for the virtual classroom tour, we recommend that field supervisors allow TCs to apply this time investment toward their required practicum hours, because engaging with the technology can offer significant long-term benefits. TCs can reflect on quality, time-stamped, annotated feedback from their field supervisors and cooperating teachers (Lynn et al., 2022) rather than just relying on memory from in-person observations (Van Boxtel, 2017). The virtual classroom tour can help TCs become more effective users of technology while also prompting them to think of how to create positive and supportive learning environments for their students. Furthermore, it also enables field supervisors to provide enhanced coaching on lesson planning before the in-person visit due to their familiarity with the classroom.

To ensure a smooth and efficient use of the video-based learning platform, Mae asked her SPED TCs to conduct a brief virtual classroom tour as a test run before recording formal sessions. This time was applied toward TCs' practicum hours, as it fostered reflection on the classroom environment for better lesson preparation and enhanced their technological skills as 21st-century special educators. This approach enabled SPED TCs to familiarize themselves with the recording and uploading process, providing Mae with valuable context about the classroom layout and routines. With this context, Mae could tailor her feedback to the specific dynamics of the learning environment, making her observations more relevant and meaningful. Using a simple self-checklist, SPED TCs practiced camera setup, lighting, and audio quality. Also, Mae encouraged them to cover laptop screens to reduce student distractions, reflect on how their classroom setup supported student needs, and confirm that media release forms were on file for students appearing in the video. These steps reduced technical hiccups, boosted SPED TCs' confidence, and set the tone for a productive, well-supported field experience.

Step 4: Obtain Lesson Plan and Other Pertinent Materials Before Lesson Review

During in-person field observations, field supervisors can view instructional materials and student work firsthand during the lesson. In hybrid formats, however, limited camera angles and visibility may prevent field supervisors from fully seeing the tools students are using, thus making it essential to receive relevant instructional materials in advance.

The field supervisor should receive the lesson plan along with accompanying lesson materials (e.g., slide deck, graphic organizers, and other tools that students will be interacting with) from the SPED TC ahead of time, not only to offer feedback on how the SPED TC might improve the lesson before it is implemented (Bussey & Lay, 2023) but also to have a preview of the lesson and gain important context. This step serves as a crucial stage-setting element that supports meaningful observation and feedback. Previewing the lesson plan and materials may assist the field supervisor in gaining an overall picture and understanding of what they will observe on the video-based learning platform. This context can fill any gaps due to limited camera angles or visual coverage during the recording. For example, if students work at their desks on a graphic organizer, the camera angle may not capture its details, potentially causing the field supervisor to miss important information needed to provide the SPED TC meaningful feedback on strategies or accommodations to meet students' needs. Providing the graphic organizer in advance allows the field supervisor to reference it while viewing the lesson, ensuring they can offer more accurate, targeted, and quality feedback.

Mae asked SPED TCs to send their lesson plans and accompanying materials to her ahead of the scheduled observations. Having the materials beforehand allowed Mae to preview the lesson and provide early feedback to support SPED TCs with practical instruction and lesson implementation. During one observation, students worked on a graphic organizer that was not visible in the video; however, Mae could reference her copy and still assess the SPED TC's ability to guide students in using it effectively to ensure her feedback remained accurate and meaningful.

Step 5: Schedule a Three-Way Post-Observation Debrief & Ensure Timely Review and Notifications

In traditional in-person field experiences, immediate post-observation debriefs with all parties can be difficult to coordinate due to scheduling conflicts, travel demands, or the cooperating teacher's instructional responsibilities. In contrast, hybrid field experiences that utilize recorded lessons can offer greater flexibility to schedule structured, reflective post-observation meetings.

The field supervisor should schedule a three-way post-observation debrief with the SPED TC and the cooperating teacher before observing the lesson. This post-observation meeting promotes timely, cohesive feedback, reducing the potential disconnect distance supervision can create between the field supervisor, cooperating teacher, and SPED TC (Smith et al., 2020). This type of coordinated post-observation debrief may occur on the same day of the lesson, yet

should occur no later than a few days after the lesson is implemented and viewed. This allows the field supervisor and cooperating teacher to share unique insights and timely feedback to support the SPED TC's reflection and identify the next steps to improve future lessons.

Another way to ensure that SPED TCs receive timely feedback is to establish an agreed-upon time of when the video will be uploaded and ready for viewing ahead of time, or an expectation that teacher candidates email their field supervisor and cooperating teacher immediately after uploading any recorded lesson to the video-based learning platform. This agreed-upon date or notification practice alerts both parties when the lesson is ready for viewing and may help prevent delays in feedback or the risk of the SPED TCs receiving little to no feedback by the end of the semester (Smith et al., 2020). Additionally, the notifications should be two-way (Smith, 2018), particularly if feedback is given using an annotated time-stamped feature. Once feedback is provided, the field supervisor and cooperating teacher should promptly inform the SPED TC that it is available for review. To maximize the effectiveness of the scheduled post-observation debrief, all parties (field supervisor, SPED TC, cooperating teacher) should review the feedback beforehand to be fully prepared for a productive discussion.

To promote timely and coordinated feedback, Mae scheduled a three-way post-observation meeting with the SPED TC and cooperating teacher before the lesson was implemented. Mae asked the SPED TC to notify both her and the cooperating teacher when the video recording of the lesson was uploaded and ready for review to ensure they could provide timely feedback. Mae also planned to ensure that the SPED TC was notified when feedback from both her and the cooperating teacher was entered for their review and reflection. Before the post-observation debrief meeting, all parties were asked to review the lesson observation feedback and reflective comments to come to the conversation ready to reflect, problem-solve, and plan the next steps.

Step 6: Observe and Deliver Timely, High-Quality Feedback

During in-person observations, feedback is often provided verbally or through handwritten or typed notes shortly after the lesson, and opportunities for in-depth, time-stamped analysis may be limited. However, hybrid field supervision leverages recorded lessons and integrated platform tools that can allow for more flexible, pointed, and reflective feedback.

If the lesson is prerecorded, Smith (2018) recommended that field supervisors and cooperating teachers view the recording no more than 3 days after being notified that the lesson was uploaded to the video-based learning platform to maintain timely feedback. By utilizing both the time-stamped prepopulated markers and open-ended feedback features of the platform, field supervisors and cooperating teachers can provide feedback aligned with the research-based criteria (Lynn et al., 2022) of the preparation program while also leveraging the open-ended comment feature to personalize feedback. This dual approach supports the diverse strengths and needs of the SPED TCs and is especially beneficial in hybrid models where field supervisors may be managing numerous students across multiple school sites (Bussey & Lay, 2023).

Encouraging the SPED TC to engage with time-stamped comments directly within the video-based learning platform can promote self-analysis and reflection skills (Smith, 2018), a vital aspect of the field experience process that develops high-quality SPED TCs (Bussey & Lay, 2023; Kaneko-Marques, 2015). Leveraging the SPED TC's reflective comments alongside feedback from the field supervisor and cooperating teacher can promote a more productive three-way post-observation debrief session where all parties collectively reflect on the TC's progress and work collaboratively to establish future goals for continued growth (Smith, 2018). After the three-way debrief, the SPED TC can critically reflect on the discussion and analyze student outcome data to generate a written reflection that identifies detailed strengths and areas for improvement to incorporate into a future lesson. During this reflection process, the SPED TC can rewatch specific points of the recorded lesson, referring back to the time-stamped feedback as needed to develop a more robust and accurate written reflection. Requiring the SPED TC to submit this written reflection within two to three days after the three-way debrief helps capture and solidify their insights while they are still fresh, aligning with Smith's (2018) recommendation to provide feedback within three days of viewing the lesson.

To ensure timely and meaningful feedback, both Mae and the cooperating teacher reviewed the prerecorded lesson within 3 days of receiving the SPED TC's notification. Mae and the cooperating teacher included time-stamped markers and open-ended comments on the video platform to align their feedback with program criteria while also referencing prior debriefing conversations with the SPED TC to personalize it to their strengths and needs. Mae encouraged the SPED TC to engage with the comments from her and the cooperating teacher directly on the platform and reflect in writing after their three-way debrief.

Mae noted that the post-observation debrief helped clarify areas of

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instruction that were difficult to assess through video alone. It also gave the SPED TC a valuable opportunity to explain their instructional decision-making and ask thoughtful questions about navigating unexpected situations that arose during the lesson. This collaborative approach helped the SPED TC feel supported and made the feedback process a key moment for reflection and professional growth. By reviewing the video-recorded lesson and submitting a reflection within three days, the SPED TC could capture their insights while still fresh and use the feedback to guide improvements in future lessons. By following the tech preparation checklist guidelines provided by Mae, the SPED TC successfully captured the lesson, ensuring appropriate reflection and feedback on the instruction. Mae was confident that the SPED TC developed useful technological skills, gained valuable insights to strengthen future instruction, and that the experience supported their overall growth as an aspiring special educator.

LIMITATIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

Further research is needed to explore the impact that hybrid approaches have on the skills of SPED TCs when compared to more traditional methods, while also examining the expenditure of resources needed to effectively implement one approach over the other. While hybrid practices hold considerable potential to enhance traditional supervision models (Smith et al., 2020; Vu & Fisher, 2021) and can offer notable cost, time, and quality benefits, particularly for special education teacher preparation programs with budget constraints supporting teacher candidates in remote or logistically challenging areas (Schmidt et al., 2015; Van Boxtel, 2017), several critical considerations warrant thorough evaluation before implementation.

A fundamental concern involves internet connectivity and diverse network access policies, especially for programs operating in rural or remote regions. Programs considering hybrid practices that serve rural and remote areas with internet connectivity challenges should consider cellular data networks that present a proven solution for mitigating such connectivity issues (Schmidt et al., 2015).

Beyond infrastructure, programs must carefully weigh the initial time investment required for technology training and preloading instructional markers against the substantial long-term advantages. These benefits encompass improved collaboration and cohesion of program expectations between cooperating teachers and supervisors, alongside sustainable efficiencies such as instant one-click feedback (Lynn et al., 2022), enhanced supervisor feedback quality, and more in-depth reflection practices of TCs (Van Boxtel, 2017). Although many scholars attest to the cost-saving potential of distant technology (Lynn et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2015), it is crucial to assess whether these savings, such as mileage reimbursement (Van Boxtel, 2017), adequately offset potential licensing fees for digital platforms. Finally, investments in dedicated technical support and diligent attention to privacy concerns associated with third-party video recording and storage are essential, though these can typically be addressed through appropriate vendor contracts and data sharing agreements. These considerations can help programs make informed decisions on whether hybrid

practices pave a viable and worthy path toward achieving their goals.

CONCLUSION

As special education teacher preparation programs serving remote and hard-to-reach areas adapt to the changing needs of schools, SPED TCs, and the evolving political landscape, hybrid field supervision has emerged as a practical, real-world solution. By blending the relationship-building and coaching benefits of in-person supervision with the flexibility and reflection supported by video-based tools, this approach offers a balanced and responsive way to support special education teacher development.

Field supervisors may face challenges such as scheduling conflicts and travel demands; however, many institutions help mitigate these issues through structured workload credit systems. With thoughtful planning, programs can further support effective supervision by incorporating tools like technological training modules, time-stamped video feedback, self-assessment instruments, and three-way debriefs to create consistent, meaningful, high-quality learning experiences. These supports not only enhance feedback and skill development but also cultivate the reflective practices and collaborative skills that new special educators need to succeed.

Ultimately, hybrid field supervision offers a flexible, scalable solution for today's dynamic educational landscape. When thoughtfully designed and well-supported, it can create a pathway to more equitable, accessible, and effective field experiences. This approach empowers SPED TCs to build the confidence, instructional expertise, and professional mindset needed to meet the complex demands of the classroom and promote positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

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