

FROM *the guest*
EDITOR

Using Non-Traditional Collaborations to Improve Special Education Teacher Preparation

AUTHOR

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As I reflect on my two decades of preparing special education teachers, my time has been spent teaching, supervising, advising, reading professional journals, conducting research, writing, attending conferences, serving on committees and boards, traveling abroad, and engaging with colleagues across the country. Across all these undertakings, one constant and continual source of amazement has persisted: We are one heck of a collaborative bunch, and we do amazing things! Not only do we know how to work together, but we do it in creative ways and for the betterment of our teacher candidates. We teach collaboration to our candidates as a high leverage practice, where the emphasis is on collaborating with other professionals and families through co-teaching, consultation, developing IEPs, and team-based service delivery. In our educator preparation programs we also emphasize (and are evaluated on) our collaborative partnerships with our P-12 partners to ensure high-quality field and clinical experiences. These approaches to collaboration, however, are traditional — expected, even. What amazes me is the wide range of non-traditional or unique collaboration examples that come together to improve educator preparation at many institutions across our country.

CALL TO COLLABORATE

The purpose of this special issue of JOSEP is to shine a light on these unique (and effective) collaborations and invite authors to share how these approaches are implemented while explaining how they enhance educator preparation. The call to authors to share examples of these unique collaborations yielded overwhelming interest. In the spirit of true collaboration, however, we looked at the response rate as an opportunity to create even more partnerships. Several themes emerged from the proposals, and we worked to form teams of authors from different institutions with varied, albeit complementary topics. The enthusiasm and synergy within the writing groups was exciting— as the editorial team witnessed strangers with common interests become scholarly partners.

IN THIS ISSUE

As the six articles took shape, we could not help but notice that in all cases the collaboration examples described were born out of a need for improvement or area in which teacher education could be enhanced for the betterment of students with disabilities. Collaborations took place on, and off, college campuses, in the community, on the stage, in museums, and across the globe.

To start, Kaleigh Pickett, Jennifer Malone, and Reesha Adamson address the glaring challenge of teacher shortages by combining efforts across education preparation providers (EPPs), the Department of Labor, and Local Education Agencies. They describe unique Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs and how success of these programs relies on creative and purposeful collaboration with outside entities but also within institutions of higher education—across academic and non-academic units on campuses that may not always come together to help students succeed.

In a similar vein, Kristin Murphy, Jennifer Kilgo, and Serra Acar share their

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experiences of working together across different university programs to prepare candidates across various disciplines. Recognizing the reality that special educators and other service providers must work together to deliver “high-quality, team-based services to students with disabilities and their families”, they describe how everything from the recruitment process to the assessment process can have an interdisciplinary focus when preparing successful candidates.

Moving from campus to community, Jennifer McKenzie, Kathy Ralabate Doody, Marcia Montague, Hollie Mason, and Jennifer Morgan describe community-based service learning as a pedagogical approach for teacher education. By its very nature, community-based service learning requires a collaborative and mutually beneficial approach that focuses on partnership and reciprocity. In their article, McKenzie and colleagues provide creative, inspiring examples of candidates being

involved in their communities where they not only learn about available resources for their future students, but practice engaging with families and other stakeholders, learning to be active participants in the community where students live, play, and grow.

Authors Colleen Wilkinson, Sarah Bubash, Renee Speight, Jennifer Sears, and Suzanne Kucharczyk describe an additional example of a unique community partnership to help teacher candidates obtain hands-on experience outside of a traditional classroom. In their article, they focus on visual and performing arts related collaborations. In one case, candidates support students with disabilities attending an art camp at a local museum where they practice positive behavioral interventions and task analysis, while in another case, art is brought into the university classroom for candidates to explore drawing with a world-renowned cartoonist who collaborates with the special education faculty to help develop candidate imagination, empathy and reflection. In their third example, Wilkinson describes how she incorporated simulated IEP team meetings into her methods course using improv actors as a parent or guardian. The actors could take on the persona of parents who may be disengaged, angry, overwhelmed, or inquisitive—an experience most candidates rarely get, particularly when discussing high stakes or sensitive topics.

Collaborating with others in the college classroom was also explored by Danene Fast, Katie McCabe, Kaylie Clinton, and John Mitchell Ulibarri. This team of authors, comprised of two faculty members and two self-advocates, who are individuals with disabilities, shared their experience using a contact-based intervention approach.

Kaylie and John Mitchell (Mitch) collaborated with the faculty members at two different universities to share their experiences directly with teacher candidates. The contact-based intervention approach is intended to reduce stigmatized perceptions teacher candidates may hold about disability.

In the final article, we shift to a global collaboration example. Authors Andrew Hashey, Lauren Foxworth, Eileen Heddy, Jerry Petroff, Gabriel Walubita, Sitwe Benson Mkandawire, and Mwansa Mukalula-Kalumbi describe two types of collaborative exchanges designed to “transform perspectives of teacher candidates and [build] skilled teacher scholars who are knowledgeable global citizens with a sense of interconnectedness with others” (see their description of “Umunthu” philosophy). The models of international collaboration included in this article illustrate the stakeholder benefits, some challenges, and suggestions for successful implementation—noting that international student teaching experiences are not limited to those outside of special education.

CONCLUSION

Each of these articles provides a unique look at ways in which collaboration outside of a P-12 context can enhance special education teacher preparation. If “necessity is the mother of invention”, in our field, we should add that it also takes collaboration to move towards a common goal. Like Helen Keller stated, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much”. As you read the unique, and what I consider amazing examples of collaboration, I hope you are inspired to reach out, explore, and partner with others to prepare the best teachers you can!