

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

LEARNING FROM A COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY GROUP

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Designing preservice teacher education partially around voluntary study groups offers teacher educators a unique chance to examine group members' perspectives and understandings. This article examines the topics of concern and questions expressed by six general education student teachers in a collaborative dialogue group focused on inclusive classrooms. Culled from seven meeting transcripts over the course of one semester, we extracted the themes of inexperience, equity, levels, normalcy, labels, and belonging as presented by these teachers in their individual inquiries into inclusive education. We consider how useful the themes, tensions, and issues unearthed in this research are for constructing a preservice teacher education curriculum for inclusive teacher preparation.

Keywords: *inclusion; preservice; study groups*

The purpose for conducting this research within teacher education is a basic one: We seek to improve our own practices by reflecting on and refining our curriculum and instruction. Our elementary master's preservice program at Teachers College is framed, in large part, around sustained inquiries of children, classrooms, schools, and communities because we believe that good teaching depends, in large part, on deeply exploring the understandings and capacities of students. This conviction also frames the work reported here: our analysis of the collaborative dialogue from one semester's voluntary study group on teaching in inclusive classrooms.

Current practices in many school districts across the United States and Canada call for teachers to meet the needs of all learners in general education classrooms. This is, in part, due to the growing recognition that classroom instruction can be designed to foster collaborative learning (Cohen, 1994), take into account students' discourse and linguistic differences (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), and draw on students' home cultures and capacities (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1996; Ramsey, 1998; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). Expecting teachers to meet a wide range of learning needs emanates also in the United States from the reaffirmation of the Individuals with Disabilities Edu-

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cation Act's (P.L. 105-17, Amendments of 1997) commitment to general education placements for students with disabilities.¹

The concurrent expectation for general education university-based teacher education programs is that they should prepare teachers to plan instruction for a wide range of learners. This is articulated, for example, in the Interstate New Teacher Assistance and Support Consortium's (INTASC) (1992) standards for novice teachers. Specifically, Standard 3 reads, "The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners" (n.p.). Much of the literature and research from inside teacher education that focuses on diverse learners has centered on issues of culture, race, ethnicity, and language. However, significantly less attention has been paid to the diversity of learners attributed to disability (Welch, 1996). The number of students with disabilities remaining in general education classrooms continues to grow, and as a result, some teacher education programs are being designed to lead to dual certification (Blanton, Griffin, Winn, & Pugach, 1997). Even so, little research documents how elementary preservice teachers learn to include students with disabilities in their classrooms.

This article grows out of our work with a voluntary inclusive preservice study group and examines the concerns and questions these student teachers expressed about being inclusive educators. We begin with an overview of the program and the group itself, concurring with Wideen and his colleagues (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998) that much research on teacher education is flawed by lack of information about the specifics of the programs themselves. Next, we present our research methods, weaving in our theoretical orientation toward collaborative dialogue as pedagogy and research. The rest of the article is devoted to a presentation of the issues that each teacher brought to the group, with final conclusions drawn regarding how these issues could inform preservice teacher education.

THE PRESERVICE PROGRAM AND INCLUSION STUDY GROUP

Ours is a large master's program with 75 to 85 student teachers each year. It includes course work taken simultaneously with contiguous fall and spring semesters of student teaching; preservice teachers are placed in city public and occasionally private schools in two different placements (one semester primary, the other intermediate). Our students typically are graduates of well-regarded undergraduate colleges and have strong GPAs. Approximately one third of the students are from historically underrepresented groups (with Asian American women being the largest of these), and our program has an intentional focus on equity and multicultural education.

Each fall, students enroll in the Preservice Core alongside their first student teaching placement; Core is a yearlong course designed to support field work. Students cannot enroll in Core if they are not student teaching, nor vice versa because the experiences, assignments, and activities in Core are deliberately linked to the field and therefore intended to help students blend school-based and university-based knowledge. The second author was a Core professor for some of the students in the current study, and the first author was participating in this group as part of a research apprenticeship.

The program does not lead to dual certification (special education/general education) nor is it specifically focused on inclusive education; so when the second author joined the faculty at Teachers College and became involved in helping to develop pilot inclusive classrooms in New York City elementary schools, she asked for volunteers to student teach in these newly established inclusive classrooms. In the 4 years of the inclusive study group, between 6 and 12 preservice teachers participated in the weekly 1-hr meetings and had at least one of their student teaching placements in an inclusive classroom. Clearly, students who volunteer for an extra weekly seminar can be seen as exceptionally motivated toward the projects of teacher education and inclusion. Their high attendance

and punctuality rates also underscore their dedication and willingness to work hard for a noncredit experience.

STUDY GROUP MEETING AND ANALYSIS

After interviewing each of the preservice teachers individually and giving them a few weeks to get settled in their student teaching placements and university course work, the inclusive study group began to meet weekly in the second author's office. Sessions were informal, with an agenda typically generated by the group members at the start of each session or at the close of the previous session. The second author and then increasingly the first author typically facilitated; however, it was a loose style of facilitation with preservice teachers jumping in to speak without seeking permission from a teacher educator. The tape-recorded conversations were characterized by much politeness: apologies were rendered when talk overlapped, students made references to each others' comments, and disagreements were often softened by gentle prefaces such as "I wonder if you might consider?" or "I have been struggling with the same issue and lately I am thinking. . . ."

It is important to note that before beginning our university careers as teacher educators, both authors taught in inclusive classrooms for a combined total of 21 years. Although we hold strong understandings about inclusive schooling (Biklen, 1992; Brantlinger, 1997; Kunc, 2000; Linton, 1998; Shapiro, 1993), we also firmly believe that learning should not, and does not, follow from imposition of the teacher's viewpoints on the students, but rather unfolds from reflective dialogue about ideas and experiences (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970). Thus, during the meetings, we mostly kept our opinions to ourselves, unless asked by the study group members to comment, much preferring to listen as they worked through the dynamic tensions inherent in learning to teach.

We wanted to sponsor a sustained oral inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), as a form of pedagogy (as these students learned from teaching) and as a form of research (as we learned from their collective talk). "For the pur-

poses of this discussion, [we] are defining all of those practices for producing understanding that depend upon mediated face-to-face interaction, continuity and commitment over time, a shared focus of inquiry, and at least a degree of trust and honesty and mutuality as oral inquiry" (Himley, 2000, p. 200). We engage in these forms of collaborative dialogue assuming that "culture, personal experience, implicit or personal theories, values and privilege, all intersect with teaching, learning, and learning to teach (Goodwin, 2002, p. 141). This study is aimed toward uncovering what our students bring along with their commitments toward teaching in inclusive classrooms. Specifically, we became interested in the concerns and issues uppermost in their minds in their early field experiences, believing that these are not merely idiosyncratic but rather suggestive of a certain range of experiences and prior knowledge many of our students share due to some common cultural experiences with schooling and disability.

DATA ANALYSIS

For this article, we analyzed seven hour-long study group transcripts (which had been transcribed by one of the student members of the group as part of a work-study relationship). We also analyzed their individual interviews, and although for the current study we do not draw on these data, these interviews provided much insight into the conversations that transpired in the group. Our method of transcript analysis was straightforward:

1. Both authors privately coded the transcripts for (a) topics initiated by each study group member and (b) contradictions and changes in each of the study group member's talk over time.
2. After this initial coding, we compared our results and listed points of convergence and divergence. When differences existed, we discussed our respective understandings.
3. We made a large chart for each study group member where we cut and pasted coded chunks of their talk; these were labeled as initiated topics or contradictory/changing ideas. We only listed items we both agreed should be included.
4. From this chart, we generated a single-word theme that characterized the general trend in their talk.

LEARNING TO TEACH INCLUSIVELY

The inclusive study group depends on collaborative dialogue among its members as the primary vehicle for developing ideas, opinions, and practices relevant to the student teachers' shared focus of becoming inclusive elementary educators. The following section highlights a focus, tension, or issue that is made visible by each member of the group in her contributions to the collaborative conversation. We want to consider how useful these themes, tensions, and issues could be for informing a preservice teacher education curriculum for inclusive teacher preparation.

Inexperience

Unlike their special education counterparts, many preservice teachers entering "regular education" do not have much experience with people with disabilities. This can be traced back to our society's historic systematic exclusion of people with disabilities from competitive employment, community housing, public transportation, and local K-12 home-zoned schools. Few people entering teaching have grown up in a community that integrates citizens with disabilities and those without disabilities. Thus, unless they have a family member or a chance encounter with people with disabilities, most preservice elementary education students we have interviewed over the years cannot recall many or any relationships with people with disabilities as they were growing up.

Stephanie Martin is quite typical of most students in general education preparation programs: "I really was not exposed to any sort of inclusion, growing up or in college, if I was near someone that I knew had a disability, I was sort of uncomfortable, I didn't know how to interact with them, and I just think that's kind of crazy."

Stephanie got interested in inclusion when she heard about it in a special education course she took as a requirement for the preservice education certification. "It wasn't even the main class but learning about it, it made me think that this was right, and now I'm in an inclusion

classroom." It is important to notice that unlike three of the other six members of the study group, Stephanie's commitment to inclusion is not based on experiences with people with disabilities, but on a moral judgment that people should not be segregated: "I guess I just have a history of treating people like they're people and that's how I see people with disabilities should be treated as well, but growing up, they were separated and I didn't have much interaction." The dual system that kept Stephanie separated from people with disabilities was not powerful enough to keep her from seeing the injustice of segregation. What is it that prepared Stephanie to be persuaded that inclusion is the right thing to do?

Stephanie is, by far, the quietist member of the group and rarely initiates topics of conversation. Perhaps this is a function of her lack of experience with people with disabilities, or in inclusive classrooms. Yet despite this inexperience, Stephanie remains a committed group member whose participation rests on moral reasoning. Hence, Stephanie's presence reminds us that preservice teachers come not only with experience but also inexperience. Small parts of preservice curriculum can have enormous effects on teachers' future commitments.

Equity

Of the six study group members, Ismat is the only one who came with teaching experience in an inclusive classroom. She worked for a year as an Americorps Volunteer in a fully inclusive elementary classroom in Boston. This experience served as a critical reference point for her in analyzing her student teaching placements. Ismat is often incredulous that the model programs in New York City involve many pull-out services and only limited conceptions of which students can be included in general education.

As a child of Pakistani immigrants, Ismat is articulate and vociferous in her belief that schools must be sites of equity for all children. In the group, Ismat's comments often move in policy directions, with a particular emphasis on service delivery models. Ismat continually is

asking what inclusion means to various constituents and who decides what structures are in place in schools.

I guess I'm more talking about policy, like who decides what inclusion means and like I was talking to [my cooperating teacher] and I said, "Well who's going to make the decision? Are the teachers who are interested in inclusion at [name of school] going to be at that district meeting, or is it going to be resource room [teachers]? . . . How does that work even, how does it happen that a certain school is going to be full inclusion?"

Just as Stephanie responds to inclusion as a moral issue, so does Ismat. In fact, Ismat sees inclusion of students with disabilities as a part of a larger equity agenda for all students:

It's morally wrong for us to differentiate or treat people differently just because of how they look, or what they've had to go through in their lives because of things that have happened to them. And I really hope that in the future we can have a classroom where there are kids, or people of varying needs and talents and abilities, and that they're not looked down on or shunned or excluded from mainstream society because of that.

It is clear to Ismat that equity for all children cannot be achieved in the midst of a dual system of special education and general education. Ismat persistently links moral equity to structural equity and seeks in her comments to understand how policies are formed and decisions are made. Her focus on matters of policy, service delivery models, and structures serve as a reminder that a chunk of inclusive teacher education should involve a systems analysis approach to classroom-based issues.

Levels

As with each of the other members of the study group, Melanie brings a unique perspective to the weekly study group meetings. The second oldest member of the group at 34 years, Melanie was a television producer at a national network before making this career change to teaching. Melanie is determined to meet the individual needs of each learner in her classroom.

I really strongly feel that I want to do everything in my power that no child leaves my classroom with-

out having the full benefit of everything we can offer. The vision in my head is to be a teacher who can reach every child. I can reach a child who is physically challenged in some way, reach a child who is learning disabled in some way, and reach a child who is emotionally withdrawn in some way.

Melanie is consistently concerned about identifying the grade levels children are working at and determining the appropriate content, concepts, and skills for each grade level. In this way, she will be able to know that no one is "slipping between the cracks" and that she has reached every child. For her, this is professional knowledge that can come in part from special education:

I want to make sure that the kids . . . who graduate from my class, really are going to get every opportunity from me to either get the help that special ed can give, be identified. . . . It's very important to me that I don't miss the signs of a child who has a certain need that's passed me and as a result is floundering more in the next grade.

She worries about grade-level progress and does not want children passed on from grade to grade without attaining certain knowledge and skills. In regard to one boy with a special education label, she told the group: "I am so worried about one of my kids, I'm just anxious, do they have to be promoted?"

Melanie's desire to identify specific levels and specific learning objectives for each level offers an important perspective for teacher education. Schools are typically designed around grade-level placements and are increasingly sites of high-stakes testing to measure how well teachers and children are doing at each grade level when compared with others in the same grade at different schools. Thus, students with disabilities are too frequently brought into classrooms with narrow and restrictive ways of measuring achievement. Such reductionist definitions of success usually do not provide the flexibility of instruction needed to simultaneously challenge and support all learners.

Melanie's contributions remind us that educating elementary education preservice teachers for inclusive classrooms and heterogeneous instruction occurs in settings where achievement is narrowly measured. Reducing skills,

concepts, and content to grade-level lists will inevitably result in some students acquiring them quickly and others never acquiring them at all. So then, how do we change the nature of classroom instruction to make it appropriate for all children? Where are students such as Melanie going to learn the skills of heterogeneous instructional planning?

Normalcy

As a consequence of systematic exclusion of people with disabilities from many sites of social encounters (schools, work, etc.), temporarily able-bodied people² come to view anyone with a visible disability as different. This education begins early in life as for instance when a child spots a person in a wheelchair coming toward the child in the supermarket. The child stops, stares, points, and loudly asks the adult with them, "What's wrong with that man?" The parent feels immediate embarrassment and shushes the child, saying, "It's not nice to point." The adult hustles the child down the aisle, barely making eye contact with the person using the wheelchair.

In this way, conversations about disability are silenced, people with visible disabilities are ignored, and another generation of teachers grows up seeing disability as pathology. This, in turn, reinforces the systematic exclusion of people with disabilities from society, which, in turn, promotes images of deviance and difference (Linton, 1998). At this point, the circle is complete, and marginalization reoccurs without interruption.

Sharon is one member of the inclusive study group whose contributions return again and again to a focus on the socially constructed nature of normality and the stigmatization of disability that is reinforced by our dual system of special education and "regular" education. Sharon's consciousness about issues of marginalization seems to grow out of her own feelings of invisibility and confusion she recalls from early elementary school when she was diagnosed with a learning disability and pulled out for remediation in the resource room. Her

disability was not openly acknowledged, and she painfully recollects feelings of frustration. On reaching graduate school, she enrolled in an unusual special education course called, "Disability: Reconsidered and Reconstructed" that gave her vocabulary to critique the marginalization and isolation she felt when receiving segregated special education services.

Certainly, Sharon's radical critique of social constructions of normalcy is not typical of most elementary education preservice students. In her contributions in the study group, Sharon often uses the term *ideology* and asserts that it is imperative for teachers to see inclusion as an ideological struggle, rather than a procedural one. She explains to the group members,

I don't think people see [disability] as a construct, I think people see this as reality, and they're not thinking about how historically this has evolved and finding ways to help people understand not in very aggressive ways but just sort of subtle ways that re-inform them or sort of shift their focus.

Although we appreciate Sharon's focus on disability as socially constructed, her contributions serve to foreground how little she brings up matters of practice. Even when matters of classroom practice do surface, Sharon uses her conversational turns to shift the focus back to beliefs. Here she is talking about her student teaching placement:

I know that there are a lot of resources [at the school], but I think it's about educating the people there, because honestly, and I don't mean to dis [the school] 'cause I think there are a lot of great things about it, but I don't think they understand what inclusion means and what they're practicing is not what I would ideally see as inclusion. . . . I think it's about being educated and seeing things in a sort of different perspective.

Sharon's study group contributions remind us that preservice teachers bring to the university classroom a long background of life experience and theoretical understandings that influence their journeys to become teachers. Just as Stephanie arrived without strongly focused viewpoints toward inclusion or disability or normality, Sharon is adamant and impassioned that ideology is at the center of all

school practices. How might we design our university-based teacher education to include both Stephanie and Sharon?

Labels

In the New York City Public Schools inclusive classrooms where these students were each placed during at least one semester, funding of special education support services is generated by the diagnostic categories given to the children and the concomitant services listed on their individual education plans (IEPs). This, of course, creates a perpetuation of the dual system of special education and general education: Without the disability label, no special education services can be offered to the child.

Liz's concerns consistently revolved around issues of labeling children and the delivery of services tied to these labels. She recognizes that the medicalized categories placed on children are often detrimental to the students as far as expectations go; however, at the same time, Liz understands that these classifications are currently necessary to get special services that she feels the students need.

The whole idea of a label, any label, is just detrimental to possibility and potential. . . . I actually had a kid in my class who's undergoing evaluation, and when she was doing a math problem she turned to me and said, "Who are you kidding, I can't do this. I'm undergoing a special ed. evaluation." But then the kid actually sat down and worked through it, she got it, and she could do it and she understood it, but she really wasn't willing to try more problems. So she had told herself that she couldn't do it because other people didn't expect her to do it.

Even though Liz sees that the child's expectations for her own learning are tied to a potential special education label, she has learned in a few short weeks of student teaching that without labels, no services are provided.

The scenario is we have kids with special needs [who are not formally labeled as disabled, therefore] we're not getting any support and my teacher's response is "Well there's nothing I can do about it." So they just kind of hang out and it's really frightening.

Before coming to Teachers College, Liz had worked for a number of years with a child with

autism using the "Options™" process (Kaufman, 1995). This is a nonspecial education alternative, humanistic approach designed to reach into the child's world—not to change them—as with applied behavior analysis (Green, Luce, & Maurice, 1996)—but to connect with them and slowly bring them into fuller communication with others. Liz judges the outcome of this process as very successful with this child; her belief that all children can learn must certainly be connected to this powerful experience.

Yet the tension produced by this successful intervention is that Liz is strongly invested in individualized and specialized services for children with disabilities. She carries a strong critique of educational practices designed to fit children into "cookie cutter shapes" however, at the same time, believes that general education teachers must all have knowledgeable and skilled special education partners. As she said: "I think there needs to be some special education help. I don't think one teacher can do it all."

Liz's ongoing focus on services and labels forces us to ask the questions, "What is special about special education?" What do teacher education programs that result in special education certification offer regarding specific knowledge about disabilities? Should all teachers be dually certified as some teacher educators advocate? (Blanton et al., 1997). Or is there particular knowledge regarding specialized approaches that should be the provenance of special educators? What sort of help will Liz be able to expect from special educators as she enters her first year of teaching?

Belonging

Based in large part on her own childhood and adult experiences, Kimberly's concerns she brought to the study group can be characterized as centering on belonging. She is adamant that a primary role of the teacher is to promote a harmonious classroom community and help every child feel appreciated, understood, visible, and valued. Kimberly, along with Liz and Sharon, has a radical critique of normalcy and feel has a

great deal of passion for people who are “othered.” Here she explained her position:

People have this idea that there’s some normal state of being and everybody’s trying to fit this normal mold, but actually not one person can fit into the normal mold, everybody is different, and based on how you view other people’s perceptions of you—kind of like a trick mirror—it really shapes your own image of yourself. Well there’s this ideal that we’re all striving for “normal” and then if you’re not normal then that leaves you to be “other” and now I see that everybody actually is an “other.”

Unlike Sharon, who also articulates a similar critique of normalcy, Kimberly focused a great deal of her attention during study group conversations on instructional practices and how they position the learner in reference to the community and belonging. Kimberly was the first one to take up the first author’s suggestion to bring an artifact from teaching into the group to stimulate a conversation on heterogeneous instruction. Kimberly brought a game she had made and, in talking about it, revealed a particular tension that we see circulating through her instructional analysis:

I was kind of passing out these decks of cards to kids that I knew, like I knew these girls are really struggling with math so I made sure that they had these pink cards and like, I’m hoping that they don’t catch on to the fact that the pink ones (laughs) are the easiest and the blue ones are the hardest.

A bit later in the conversation, she explained her rationale for trying to hide the color-coded leveled card scheme from the fifth graders in her student teaching classroom: “I think that’s the measure of a good teacher—a teacher that can identify those different levels without letting the students know that she’s kind of targeting these different levels of instruction to them.”

Thus, Kimberly’s concerns serve to vividly illustrate a critical issue for teachers to resolve or at least address as they learn to develop heterogeneous instruction. On the one hand, Kimberly wants to create a classroom environment in which all individuals, no matter what their differences, have a place of value in the community. However, on the other hand, to preserve students’ dignity and save them embarrassment of being stigmatized, she designed

instructional activities to obscure differences from view of the students. How do we as teacher educators help Kimberly explore the inherent contradiction between her viewpoint that normalcy is an illusion and the very real differences that human learners always bring to the classroom?

DIRECTIONS FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHER EDUCATION

Much of teacher education is designed around identifying and changing prospective educators’ understandings about teaching, student learning, and the purpose of education (Wideen et al., 1998). Yet despite teacher educators’ best intentions, the understandings preservice teachers hold dear tend to endure over time or be altered only slightly by their student teacher experiences; after all, an individual’s pedagogical slate is not blank when she or he enters a teacher education program. Perhaps a more fruitful endeavor would be to create collaborative forums for our students to come together in dialogue, sharing and grappling with their own critical reflections. In this sense, our aim is not to mask, alter, or obscure their understandings but unearth the passions, perspectives, and experiences the teachers bring to the education profession, learn from them, and then build on the beliefs that already exist and connect them to a larger educational conversation (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1989; Wideen et al., 1998).

In this article, we extracted key issues presented by individual preservice teachers in their inquiries into inclusive education. We want to use these issues as guideposts in our own design of inclusive teacher education. We consider this work of curriculum development to be ongoing, recursive, collaborative, and self-critical; that is, we do not consider the four points we list next as either exhaustive or fixed. They merely provide us with next steps in our program design for the upcoming year.

First, we are reminded that although students express a shared commitment to inclusion, the bases for these commitments vary

greatly depending on experience. Some students have disabilities themselves or family members, neighbors, or friends with disabilities. Other preservice teachers have worked with children with disabilities. In any of these cases, such direct experience lends a degree of confidence to the preservice teachers' inquiries on inclusion. Yet for others with little or no experience, their own moral compass positions them as no less committed, only less knowledgeable. Thus, any teacher education curriculum must take into account this range of experience. The study group provides a fertile format for individual knowledge to be shared publicly and then become part of each teacher's repertoire.

The second point that we take from this inquiry into the content focus of the study group is the depth of these students' commitment to moral and ideological arguments as guides to their practice. Frankly, we were a bit astounded to discover that these preservice teachers returned again and again to beliefs and moral judgments as their reference points for questions. Having been embroiled for so many years in fairly technocratist methods courses (Hinchman & Oyler, 2000) we were delighted by these students' desires to think philosophically about what is right, just, and possible. They were not merely trying to determine what to do on Monday morning but were committed to making good decisions for children. We will be eager to follow this focus into their 1st years of teaching and see how the demands of daily teaching interface with these perspectives.

The third implication for our work as teacher educators is related to the previous issue; that is, along with philosophy, these preservice teachers are also quite interested in policies, politics, and service delivery models. As experienced teachers, we often take structures and systems of schooling a bit for granted and have not spent much time on helping our students examine the histories, assumptions, and consequences for the organizational decisions that undergird the dual systems of special education and general education. Toward this end, we want to consider using a book such as Barry Franklin's *From*

"Backwardness" to "At-Risk": Childhood Learning Difficulties and the Contradictions of School Reform (1994), to provide a historical and sociological framework for understanding current systems.

Last, Melanie and Kimberly's concerns focusing on levels of student achievement directly address our initiating concern; that is, how do preservice teachers learn to meet the educational needs of all students in general education classrooms? As experienced inclusive elementary teachers, we know such instructional planning is challenging, sophisticated, and complicated. However, a lesson that the study group conversations had to teach us is that the design of such heterogeneous instruction is not yet a central burning question for these preservice teachers' inquiries. Although Kimberly sometimes initiated discussion about how to deal with different students receiving easier and harder materials for instruction, rarely did the group invest much time in microanalyzing instructional questions. Likewise, Melanie focused attention on student achievement levels with her concern that all children be brought up to grade level. Yet the day-to-day practicalities such topics demand were rarely addressed by the group.

This analysis of our study group conversations about inclusion with these six student teachers helped us examine some of the understandings and questions these preservice teachers brought with them into their teacher education program. Through our weekly meetings we came to hear their interests in philosophy, policy, and matters of educational equity. However, we did not hear many questions about the sophisticated instructional practices we know to be crucial to the success of heterogeneous classrooms. This conspicuous gap makes us recommend further research into this area; specifically, how representative is this group when compared with other preservice teachers working at the master's level? What are such teachers' needs as they enter their first few years of teaching? And most important, do these teachers remain committed to the ideals they brought with them into teacher education?

NOTES

1. Our use of the phrase "students with disabilities" reflects our 20-year commitment to using "people-first" language that focuses attention on the individual first and then on the disability. However, we were more recently persuaded by disability rights advocates (many of whom are themselves disabled) that using the phrase "disabled person" recognizes the fact that disability is often a large aspect of the disabled person's identity, rather than an appendage (Oliver, 1990). We use these phrases interchangeably, with the recognition that the language people use to describe themselves and others changes over time and within sociopolitical contexts.

2. A disability rights activists' term for individuals who are nondisabled.

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