

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVITY: PREPARING PRESERVICE TEACHERS FOR DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Teacher education is a field containing significant pressures in curriculum, practicum design and in the roles and relationships with schools. There is no standard approach in teacher education to prepare teachers to teach children with exceptional needs. In Canada, educators estimate that about 15 percent of students have special learning needs (Timmons, 2006). Some universities, in their teacher education programs, offer elective courses on diversity, while others have the subject as a core component of their curriculum. Lupart et al. (2004) highlight the need for teachers and administrators to be better prepared to meet the needs of diverse students in today's classrooms. However, preparing teachers for an inclusive classroom is a complex endeavour. One of the first challenges is the question, who is a diverse learner. Another challenge that the teachers face as they are educated to teach in an inclusive classroom is that many did not graduate from a system that was inclusive, while another challenge is that the educational system often works against promoting inclusive practices. Another area of concern is the lack of diversity among teachers (Finley, 2000). This paper will try to address these questions and explore inclusive practices in relation to teacher education, a vital area of social justice.

KEYWORDS: *Teacher Education, Challenges, Inclusive Education, Diversity, Practice, System*