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Over the past three decades, increased migration resulting from globalization has dramatically transformed the demographic makeup of nations throughout the world (Ben-Peretz, 2009). Nowhere is this transformation more apparent than in public elementary and secondary schools, where the student population has become increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language, and economic class. In the United States, for example, students of color already comprise more than 43% of total enrollments, with the numbers trending upward (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009); English language learners (ELLs) account for more than 10% of all students served (National Council of La Raza, 2008), and more than 22% of children 18 years of age and younger live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). At the same time, the movement toward inclusive education has added further to the diversity of U.S. classrooms. Legislative mandates requiring students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment appropriate for them has increased the number of learners with developmental needs in general education classes (Pugach & Blanton, 2009). These changes raise questions about the type of preparation all classroom teachers need to successfully teach students with a wider range of backgrounds and experiences than ever before. The articles in this special issue of the *Journal of Teacher Education (JTE)* examine this timely topic by engaging a stellar group of scholars in a discussion of how educators across diversity communities might collaboratively address the preparation needs of today's teachers.

As the articles in this issue show, the relationship across diversity communities, and in particular multicultural and special educators, is complicated. Philosophically, the two fields have much in common; however, disciplinary and practical differences create serious barriers to the needed collaboration. In my commentary, I aim to pull together the threads in the conversation between multicultural and special teacher educators surrounding issues of collaboration, as reflected in this issue. I begin with a brief discussion of collaborative teacher education—a central concept to the dialogue—and then comment on why I think such an approach to preparing teachers for today's schools is compelling and what is at stake if we fail to collaborate. Looking across the articles, I then highlight major tensions between the fields of multicultural and special education that demand candid discussion before the collaboration can take place.

Building on insights offered by the authors who write from a multicultural perspective and my own professional experience, I identify a few ideas that have the potential for moving the needed collaboration forward.

First, I want to share highlights of my background to help readers understand how I am positioned in this conversation and the perspective I bring to it. I am a Latina from an economically poor background who immigrated to the United States with my family at the age of 6 and attended public schools in New York City as an ELL long before this term was first used by educators. Currently, I am a faculty member in a teacher education program that has an explicit social justice mission. I came to teacher education with an academic background in the sociology of education and experience as a bilingual teacher in a highly diverse and economically poor New York City community. I consider myself a specialist in teaching students who are poor and of racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority backgrounds, and much of my writing addresses issues in the preparation of teachers who are culturally and linguistically responsive. A decade ago, Tamara Lucas and I published a book with relevance to the goal of this *JTE* issue. In that work, we called on our colleagues, both within our institution and beyond, to “rethink” the preparation of teachers for a diverse student population—although the focus of this work was on students' race, ethnicity, social class, and language—the dimensions of diversity at the center of our expertise (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This issue of *JTE* calls on teacher educators to engage in a similar approach to curricular revision but broadens the definition of diversity that Tamara Lucas and I worked from to also include students who have disabilities.

Collaborative Teacher Education: What is at Stake?

Blanton and Pugach (2007) offer a useful typology of collaborative models related specifically to the preparation of

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teachers for students who have disabilities. Although a discussion of those models is beyond the scope of my commentary, highlights from this typology will help situate the dialogue between multicultural and special teacher educators featured in this *JTE* issue within the context of ongoing developments to redesign teacher education to better prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms. The typology identifies three types of programs—discrete, integrated, and blended. According to the authors, general and special education teachers have historically been prepared mostly in separate or “discrete” programs, each leading to a teaching certificate in either general or special education. Although students are often required to take one course with faculty from the other program track (e.g., general education teacher candidates might take an inclusion course taught by a special educator and special education teacher candidates might take a course in the teaching of a specific subject matter with a general teacher educator), the discrete program model requires little or no systematic collaboration between general and special education faculty; the two programs function on parallel tracks, independent of one another. Recently, however, this approach to preparing general and special education teachers has been criticized for being out of step with the reality of today’s classrooms, where students who have disabilities are increasingly taught alongside their peers of different backgrounds (Fullerton, Ruben, McBride, & Bert, 2011).

The editors of this *JTE* issue (Pugach, Blanton, and Florian) advocate for moving away from the discrete program approach to the preparation of general and special education teachers that prevails today to a collaborative approach that involves faculty from general, multicultural, and special teacher education working together to redesign and implement programs that prepare all teachers to successfully teach all students. Collaborative programs may lead to a teaching certificate in either general or special education or may culminate in dual certification. Despite the wide variation that exists across such programs, they all share one feature—the purposeful coordination of the curriculum with the goal of engaging teacher candidates in a cohesive set of experiences focused on learning to teach diverse student populations.

To unpack the dialogue across teacher educators from different diversity communities represented in this issue, it is helpful to first ask why collaboration merits attention. What is so important about the collaboration we are being invited to be part of? Surely, we all know that collaborative efforts are time-consuming and often stressful. To willingly engage in them, one needs a compelling reason for doing so. In the Pugach and Blanton article published in this issue of *JTE*, the authors articulate such a reason. As they put it,

The P-12 students taught by program graduates are not defined by only a single social identity marker of diversity. Rather, a construct such as disability itself

exists within a larger framework of race, culture, language, and social class that characterizes all students. (p. 6)

Thus, teachers teach children whose identities are influenced by their various locations in the social hierarchy based on race, ethnicity, class, language, ability/disability, and the intersection of all these factors. For instance, a teacher might teach a child who has a learning disability and is also Hispanic, poor, and an ELL. To successfully teach this student, the teacher needs to understand how his or her experiences within these different social groups combine to shape his or her identity and define the strengths and needs he or she brings to the learning process. Equally important, the teacher must have a unified or integrated pedagogical framework to make informed instructional decisions that appropriately address not only the learner’s disability but also his or her needs and strengths associated with his or her racial, ethnic, linguistic, and social class backgrounds. Exposed to a fragmented curriculum that lacks content integration across the courses taught by general, multicultural, and special teacher educators, preservice candidates are left on their own to integrate as best they can ideas developed in the different courses they have taken into a cohesive teaching framework. Saddled with this monumental responsibility, program graduates are not likely to deliver on the promise of educating all students.

Divisions in teacher education are not unusual. Fragmentation in the preparation of teachers is well documented in the literature not only across courses in the professional sequence but also between courses in the arts and sciences and in education, coursework and fieldwork, and theory and practice, among other disconnects (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). Given this history, it is not surprising that engaging faculty from different fields in the development of collaborative teacher education programs is difficult. Despite the challenge, however, the number of collaborative efforts involving general and special teacher educators is on the rise (Fullerton et al., 2011). In light of this trend, it is disheartening to learn that the well-established merged programs in the preliminary study reported by Pugach and Blanton in this issue—all of which were redesigned to prepare teachers for a wide range of student diversity—focused their curricula more on disabilities, while giving relatively less attention to other dimensions of diversity. Although these findings are tentative and should be treated with caution, they nonetheless alert us to the challenges inherent in developing a curriculum that presents an integrated framework for teaching children from a wide range of backgrounds. The findings from this study, in conjunction with those of several other investigations Pugach and Blanton discuss in their literature review, suggest that some (perhaps many) teacher candidates in dual certification programs are being exposed to an incomplete view of differences. Yet, on completion of those programs, graduates qualify for a certificate that enables them to teach all children, not just

students with disabilities. By not taking an active role in efforts to conceptualize and implement dual certification programs, those of us in multicultural teacher education might be unwittingly contributing to this problem. The rapid expansion of dual certification programs within teacher education in this country demands responsible action on the part of all teacher educators, including those of us who have expertise in multicultural education.

Common and Contested Ground

At first glance, it is difficult to understand why collaboration across diversity communities, especially multicultural and special teacher educators, has been slow to develop. These two groups have much in common. Most fundamentally, both fields are grounded in the belief that all children have a right to learn, regardless of their backgrounds. There is also wide consensus that no single formula exists for teaching all students. Instead, teachers need to develop skills for tailoring their practices to the specific students they teach, while building on the students' strengths and addressing their needs. Equally important, both fields promote the view that teachers have an ethical responsibility to do everything they can to ensure that all students learn. As such, both groups agree that cultivating the disposition to advocate for students and developing the skills required to do so are central tasks of teacher education. Despite these shared commitments, multicultural teacher educators have remained largely marginal to efforts aimed at redesigning teacher education with the goal of preparing all teachers for today's inclusive classrooms. The articles by Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling; Irvine; and Rueda and Stillman offer insights into the problem.

Looking across these articles, I see two major points of tension that split the multicultural and special education communities—differences in the disciplinary perspectives that inform the two fields and the historical overrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in special education. Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling offer a thoughtful discussion of the disciplinary clashes involved. As they explain, multicultural education is informed by theoretical perspectives derived largely from the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, and thus has a sociocultural orientation; special education draws mostly from psychology and takes an individual orientation. These disciplinary differences manifest themselves in a variety of ways. For example, the normal distribution, a notion derived from psychometrics, continues to play a large role in special education despite ongoing efforts within the field to abandon bell-curve thinking. Building on the normative model, special educators tend to define students' ability relative to an average or norm, with some learners considered above average and others below average. From a multicultural perspective, the distribution of students' abilities along a normal curve promotes the view that those "below" average are deficient in ability and in need of fixing. That is, the assumption that

ability is normally distributed constructs some "differences" (i.e., those of students at the lower end of the distribution) as "deficits." Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling underscore this point as they astutely point out that the word disability (literally meaning the absence of ability) both normalizes and reinforces deficit thinking. In their view, the deficit mind-set is similarly reinforced by the prevalence of the medical model approach to diagnosing students' disabilities and then developing some type of treatment to remedy the identified problem. Multicultural educators are critical of deficit thinking on grounds that it lowers the expectations teachers have for students who do not fit the norm and consistently results in a watered down education for these students. In fact, deficit thinking is seen within multicultural education as a mechanism in a biased sociopolitical system that structures educational inequalities, constructing success for some and failure for others.

Differences in the disciplinary traditions that inform multicultural and special education also show up in the pedagogical frameworks that prevail within each field. Differentiated instruction is an approach often used within special education. As I understand it, this view of teaching is theoretically informed by work on learning styles, brain research, and multiple intelligences. This practice aims to teach the same content to students in mixed ability classes, modifying the complexity of the content, teaching approach, and learning outcomes for those at different developmental levels. Although differentiated instruction (and other similarly informed teaching approaches) recognizes individual differences relative to readiness, it tends to be silent on students' sociocultural differences. From the multicultural perspective, teaching practices that ignore the sociocultural influences on students' lives are suspect because they tend to obscure patterns of social discrimination that severely hamper the education of children from backgrounds other than the mainstream. As a result, students are held individually accountable for their academic success, with no consideration given to social factors that play a role in their academic performance, such as poverty. To avoid falling into this trap, multicultural educators adopt a culturally responsive teaching framework. This approach to teaching uses students' cultural experiences as a bridge to learning and, in doing so, validates the learners' home cultures. Culturally responsive teaching also broadens the traditional curriculum by guiding students to examine it from multiple perspectives, helping them to understand whose voices are reflected (or not) in the curriculum. This view of teaching treats cultural differences as strengths to be built on with the explicit goal of empowering students from marginalized cultural groups. Unfortunately, most current conceptions of culturally responsive teaching are silent on the developmental needs of individual learners. Unless differences in the pedagogies of special and multicultural educators, such as the one described above, are worked out within teacher education, preservice teachers are bound to leave their

preparation programs with views of teaching that ignore the multidimensional identities of students they will encounter in their classes.

Collaboration between multicultural and special teacher education is also challenged by suspicion arising from the overrepresentation of students of color in special education. This point is brought home clearly in the article by Irvine. African American children have been historically overrepresented in special education—particularly in the categories of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and learning disability—classifications that rely heavily on evaluator judgment. According to Irvine, such persistent overrepresentation has given rise to a deep sense of mistrust of special education within the African American community. A large part of the problem, as she sees it, is that teachers lack a multicultural framework for making sense of Black students' behavior. As a result, they inappropriately refer many Black children, especially Black boys, for special education testing. Once referred, however, the chances of their being placed in special education dramatically rise. Rueda and Stillman are similarly critical of the overrepresentation problem, although from the perspective of ELLs. Like Irvine, they see cultural misunderstandings on the part of teachers as a major contributor to the disproportionate placement of ELLs in special education. Making matters more complex, linguistic and cultural biases in tools used to evaluate students for disabilities add to the problem. They further contend that because educators typically lack an understanding of second-language acquisition, they are prone to confusing aspects in the natural process of second-language development for disabilities. Sadly, misidentification seriously limits children's future possibilities, a point underscored in the articles by Rueda and Stillman and by Irvine.

The tensions between multicultural and special teacher educators evident in this issue of *JTE*, highlights of which I have mentioned above, are rarely addressed openly. Yet, without engaging in this dialogue, we are passing up the opportunity the movement toward inclusive education is providing us for rethinking teacher education in ways that place student diversity, broadly defined, at the heart of the curriculum. By creating a forum for representatives of these two communities to speak candidly about the differences that divide, this special issue makes a critically important contribution to the field of teacher education.

Moving the Collaboration Forward

From reading the articles in this volume and reflecting on my own experience as a teacher educator, I have identified four ideas that stand out as having the potential for moving the collaboration forward. One of those is Rueda and Stillman's suggestion that collaborative teacher education programs adopt a cultural perspective on teaching and learning. Rueda and Stillman build their proposal on a

pragmatic view of culture. From this perspective, culture refers to routine practices in everyday life that enable individuals to survive and prosper within a community, including the ways in which community members solve problems, interact with one another, use language, and behave. When applied to teaching and learning, this view of culture suggests that all students—not just some—bring to school a rich set of cultural experiences that teachers can use as a springboard for helping them learn even more. This conception of culture challenges deficit views of learners that many educators have developed about students who differ from the cultural norm on which schools are built. It also underscores the importance of helping teacher candidates develop skills for learning about their future students and using insights gained for pedagogical purposes. Rueda and Stillman make a reasoned and persuasive argument for using this conception of culture as a platform on which to build a teaching framework that will prepare graduates to learn about their students' intersecting needs and develop a unified teaching approach to addressing those needs. I wholeheartedly support Rueda and Stillman's proposal. I suspect, however, that progress toward this end will be stalled until multicultural and special teacher educators begin to seriously discuss and work out the points of tension arising from their disciplinary differences, as discussed in the previous section of this commentary.

Given the barrier that bell-curve thinking poses to the collaboration between multicultural and special teacher educators, it was inspiring to read about the progress our colleagues in Scotland have made on this front. As Florian details in her article, the Inclusive Practice Project she describes takes a critical stance on "bell-curve thinking" and "notions of fixed ability." It also uses a social justice approach to teacher preparation that purposefully promotes "a view of difference as a normal part of the human experience." Those of us in the United States have much to learn on this topic from our colleagues in Scotland and other European countries, who seem to be ahead of us in this aspect of teacher education.

The overrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in special education is a topic that has provoked considerable criticism from the multicultural education community. This too is an area that demands attention. To move the development of collaborative teacher education programs forward, multicultural and special teacher educators need to examine this problem and agree to take decisive action to address its source, within the scope of teacher preparation. One such action is to make certain that the teachers we prepare are culturally and linguistically competent. Rueda and Stillman's proposal would go a long way toward ensuring that teachers develop the needed expertise to distinguish between behaviors that differ from the cultural norm or that reflect the process of second-language learning on one hand, and disabilities on the other. Irvine's framework for preparing culturally

responsive teachers, described in her article, is relevant here as well. Future teachers also need to learn basic principles about first- and second-language development (see Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). In addition, teachers need to know about the overrepresentation of students of color in special education, factors that contribute to this overrepresentation, and the consequences of misdiagnosis for individual students.

The final idea I will offer comes from my own work with Tamara Lucas on culturally responsive teaching. A salient quality of the culturally responsive teachers we envision is sociocultural consciousness. We define this construct to mean an awareness that one's worldview is not universal but is profoundly shaped by one's life experiences as mediated by a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, social class, and language. Developing sociocultural consciousness involves learning to see oneself as an individual who is also raced, classed, and gendered, to mention just a few of the many social markers in one's life. Teachers who lack an awareness or who are dysconscious of the multiple social positions they inhabit as individuals and how such positioning influences their understanding of self and the world (including how they see students) are not likely to acknowledge, let alone understand, the complex and intersecting identities of their students—an insight critical to developing the unified teaching approach needed to teach today's students.

Ultimately, the impact of the public dialogue featured in this issue will be measured in terms of the frequency and seriousness of similar discussions it sparks among faculty in schools and colleges of education in the United States and elsewhere. My hope is that this collection of articles will create the disequilibrium needed to propel us—general, special, and multicultural teacher educators—to collaboratively reconstruct teacher education as a transformative experience that truly prepares all teachers for all students.

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