*An executive summary of*

# What Unites Us All: Establishing Special Education Teacher Education Universals

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## Project Summary

- Human universals can serve as an analogue for the identification and description of special education teacher education universals.
- A systematic review of literature was conducted; the intent of the review was to identify special education teacher education universals or essential elements. These essential elements were categorized as: policy, practice, pedagogy, and teacher preparation/co-curricular activities.
- Twenty-four journals that publish articles related to teacher education were reviewed.
- Articles were limited to The aim of the review was to bring clarity, provide guidance, consistent parameters, and practices that should define special education teacher education.

## Background

- Many disciplines have identified/established principles, universals that provides a foundation for the field. For example, many psychologists use the unifying life science theory of evolution to understand and interpret human behavior.
- Universals often provide a common language as well as a common starting point for how a field moves forward.
- Human universals have provided several fields with a valuable framework from which to develop both theory and practice. These universals are based on observed on commonalities identified amongst all humans (absolute universals), with some exceptions (near universals), and conditional universals.
- The identification of special education teacher education universals may provide the essential elements for scholarship and a common framework for teacher candidate preparation.

## Process

- The review began with the identification and then selection of teacher education journals, published in English and accessible electronically.
- Using Genamics Journal Seek, journals were identified using the key search phrases: "teacher education" and "special education," and then "students with disabilities."
- The search yielded over 350 journals using the key search phrases "teacher education" and "special education." Eighty journals were identified using the key search phrase "students with disabilities."
- The two lists of journals were crosschecked for duplication. All duplicates were eliminated from the list. The remaining journals were checked to ensure publication between the years 2004 and 2015 as well as electronic accessibility. The final lists of journals meeting all criteria was 24.
- To extrapolate information from the articles, a coding system was developed. The coding system was developed based on a deductive conceptualization of special education teacher education using the extant literature (i.e., reviews of literature, consultation with scholars in the field, and discussion of experiences and content).
- The process resulted in the following categories:
  - policy
  - practices
  - pedagogy, and
  - teacher preparation/co-curricular activities.
- These categories represent essential elements of special education teacher education.
- For the review, the 24 journals were divided among the three authors. Reviews were conducted systematically, beginning with the table of contents of each issue from each year of the journal to identify titles reflected special education teacher education topics.
- All articles reflecting the topic were coded.
- Each article was placed into one of the four categories listed above and further evaluated for additional Information, such as program setting and type (e.g., alternative certification program).

## Findings and Conclusions

The review yielded three critical findings:

- First, half of the literature reviewed (51%) for the study focused on teacher preparation/co-curricular activities or essentially, the general learning activities used to teach/train teachers how to instruct students. Findings suggest that a majority of the special education teacher education literature continues to report activities conducted as part of programming, which reflects traditional teacher education literature. is
- Second, teacher education policy (4%) rarely appears in the literature. Possible reasoning for this small percentage is unclear.
- Third, a great deal of literature focused on what special education teacher educators do. This is in contrast to the practices and pedagogies that special education teacher educators convey to pre-service teachers.

## Recommendations for Action

- This review offers a method for identifying and describing special education teacher education universals.
- Attention should be paid to policy governing special education teacher education as well as policy that should be in place in regard to pre-service programs and in-service practice.
- There is a substantial literature base reporting special education teacher practices. Efforts should be made to ensure that evidence-based practices and promising practices are communicated to special education teachers via literature as well as other means.

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