(Re)-Defining 'Teacher': Preservice Teachers with Disabilities in Canadian Teacher Education Programs*

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Directors of Student Teaching from the Western Canadian provinces participated in focus groups about the realities and decision-making processes around practicum for preservice teachers with disabilities. Results showed current standards, when applied rigidly, served to reify a static, homogenous, and unrealistic definition of 'teacher' that marginalises preservice teachers with disabilities. However, the effort of directors to challenge this notion of 'teacher', framed within the constructionist model of disability, gives hope for a more inclusive future teaching force.

Keywords: teacher education, inclusion, preservice teacher, practicum

In his 2017 examination of the ability of schools to act as catalysts for wider societal reform based on equity, William Pink asked, 'What would schools look like, and what would be the role of the teacher in a school that was committed to maximizing equity?' (2017, para. 2). In the past number of years, researchers have demonstrated an evolution and expansion of notions of equity and inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom environment and have offered some answers to Pink's question. Database searches reveal thousands of articles on the topic of inclusion in schools, including entries that explore everything from the intersectionality between diverse communities including students with disabilities (Pugach, Blanton, & Florian, 2012) to the incorporation of topics from disability studies in education intended to prepare teachers to teach in an inclusive classroom environment (Gilham & Tompkins, 2016).

Although it is clear that researchers are making gains in discovering how to facilitate the inclusion of all *children* in schools through teacher preparation, there is comparatively little current research that considers the education and inclusion of teachers with disabilities (TWDs) themselves within the same system. The research that does exist on this topic is often case-study based (R. C. Anderson, 2006; Clayton, 2009) or philosophically focused (Campbell, 2009). Those types of research are helpful in understanding the unique viewpoints of TWDs, and recognising the theoretical issues they face, but little is known about how to practically accommodate preservice TWDs so that they too can become leaders of inclusive classrooms (Valle, Solis, Volpitta, & Connor, 2004).

In the current research, we therefore aim to fill this lacuna in the literature by examining how Canadian teacher education programs are addressing the needs of preservice TWDs during practicum courses. In contrast to the existing case-study research, we conducted

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focus groups with Directors of Student Teaching (DSTs) across Western Canada in order to investigate systemic approaches to accommodations during practicum, revealing both progress and roadblocks within these systems.

Framing Disability Within the Medical Model

Given the virtually nonexistent research literature about preservice TWDs, we examined the slightly less limited research base on inservice TWDs in order to gain an understanding of how TWDs are positioned in schools. In general, research on TWDs tends to be viewed from the lens of the medical model of disability, which understands disability as an inherent deficit within the individual (Gilson & DePoy, 2002). Accordingly, this viewpoint is focused upon various ways that individuals or institutions can remedy these deficiencies to overcome various aspects of disability.

The medical model is problematic to the successful inclusion of TWDs in the school system for several reasons. In addition to the stigmatisation and marginalisation TWDs face within this lens, when disability is viewed as a 'deficit', the professional competency of TWDs is also called into question. Within this model, teachers who disclose their disability are faced with navigating the stigma associated with disabilities. Consequently, there is a risk associated with disclosure of a disability that may outweigh the perceived potential benefits of disclosure (Valle et al., 2004). Recognition of this risk by TWDs means that some may forgo the accommodations to which they are entitled. Moreover, they may also forfeit other positive benefits of disclosure, such as an empathic viewpoint and unique attitude towards students going through similar experiences, in an effort to conform to the norm (Ferri, Keefe, & Gregg, 2001). Important insight is also often lost through the lens of the medical model of disability, as it fails to consider TWDs as not only competent, but as an additional source of knowledge, and an important authority on lived experience when considering topics surrounding inclusive pedagogy (R. C. Anderson, 2006; Campbell, 2009). In effect, the continued silence of these teachers, ironically and unfortunately, further perpetuates the medical model of disability (Valle et al., 2004).

Framing Disability Within the Constructionist Model

Fortunately, alternative viewpoints exist that seek to reframe disabilities not as deficits to be counteracted, but as 'a tool to help them [TWDs] relate to their students' (Ferri et al., 2001, p. 28). Our study is framed within the constructionist model of disability and social dominance theory. Rather than the deficit-based medical model, the constructionist model of disability posits that disability is an external phenomenon developed in response to the environment's inability or unwillingness to adapt to the full spectrum of human diversity (Creswell, 2007; Hahn, 1994). Social dominance theory proposes that hierarchies within all societies are constructed on the basis of social in-group and out-group identities. Applying this theory to the study of disability has resulted in the conclusion that able-bodied people hold unearned dominance over people with disabilities (Kattari, 2015), and through intransigent structures, policies, and practices, this social hierarchy is replicated and reinforced over time. By recognising disability as a phenomenon constructed within social hierarchies, we are presented with the opportunity to deconstruct these human-built limitations and re-envision a different sort of social order.

Benefits of the Constructionist Model in Inclusive Schooling

Replacing or pre-empting stereotypes. In the context of TWDs, the importance of the constructionist model is twofold. First, exposure to competent TWDs can pre-empt or

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challenge children's negative stereotypes about disabilities. Providing children with these positive models can also help foster the idea that disability and competence often occur simultaneously. It is important not to discount just how crucial an influence schools have in the socialisation of young minds. The hidden curriculum refers to what students learn as a consequence of the learning environment, rather than the intended curriculum (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). Values of the school system are reflected not only in explicit curricular objectives but also in how the system is structured and operated (R. J. Anderson & Karp, 1998). Through the presence of competent models of disability, we are reinforcing the idea that the educational system itself endorses competent TWDs as an important part of inclusive schools.

This phenomenon of professional competence through constructionism has been noted in several case studies. Gerber (1998) found reframing — an active approach that aids in viewing disability in a 'positive or productive manner' (p. 57) — to be a key component in helping to develop the mindset of being 'a teacher who is learning disabled, rather than a person with learning disabilities who is a teacher' (p. 58). Bryant and Curtner-Smith (2008) found elementary-aged pupils learned *more* about swimming from a physical education teacher when she was in a wheelchair than when she was able-bodied, and found no significant differences in perceptions of likeability, mastery of content, or ability to be a role model between teachers with and without disabilities teaching the same lesson. Fitting with a sociological perspective, these authors suggested that their findings resulted from pupils not yet having been socialised in stereotypes about what an 'athletic body' looks like, and in turn the participant students 'were more than prepared to accept a physical education teacher with a disability as credible' (p. 126). This study's interpretation suggests that, left unchecked, students will be socialised into the medical model of disability, but that these stereotypes can be supplanted when students are exposed to competent TWDs.

In other investigations of how stereotypes about disability develop in students, Beckett (2014) examined the assumptions that English schoolchildren made about people with disabilities. Findings indicated that although many children studied did seem to view disability through a medical lens, other children offered differing responses that suggested emergent ideas relating to universal human rights, fairness, and other issues within the constructionist lens. This finding supports the work of Bryant and Curtner-Smith (2008), who posited that children's schemata regarding disabilities are malleable. Specifically, Beckett (2014) referenced Sewell who argued that the best time to foster social change is in fact when competing schemas arise, and that these nascent ideas will serve learners well as adults when they have an even greater capacity to transform how disability is viewed and discussed (Sewell, as cited in Beckett, 2014). The capacity of schools to become incubators for such thinking is supported by R. C. Anderson (2006), who contends that educational environments can indeed be transformed through the engagement of people with and without disability.

Valle et al. (2004) also noted the importance of socialisation of students, specifically in how disabilities are 'understood and talked about—or not—by professional colleagues, students, and parents of students' (p. 15). Until this discourse changes, and TWDs perceive that they will still be viewed as competent professionals upon disclosure, these researchers caution that TWDs are regrettably withholding the opportunity for students with disabilities to have a role model in which they can see themselves reflected. In a similar fashion, Ferri et al. (2001) speculated that perhaps the reason that their study showed TWDs who were teaching students with disabilities could not think of another teacher in a similar situation was because many TWDs choose not to disclose that aspect of their identity.

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Together, these studies suggest that the medical model and its incumbent notions of deficit and incompetence is framing the decision-making of many inservice TWDs.

Proportional representation as a model of an inclusive society. A second rationale supporting the importance of the constructionist model of disability is that it helps contribute to the concept of proportional representation of various categories of teachers, including TWDs, in the education system. Proportional representation from various groups re-envisions schools as a microcosm of larger society, and views diversity within this setting as normal, rather than viewing abled-bodied people as 'normal' and people with disabilities as 'other'. This mindset is an essential component of inclusion and one that must be reified to achieve full inclusion in schools and the educational system at large. Research has described the uniquely inclusive pedagogy TWDs engender as a result of their past experiences. Duquette's (2000) case study noted the supportive and positive classroom environments fostered by TWDs, and showed that they often resulted from these teachers' past negative school experiences. Ferri et al. (2001) also reported on TWDs who encouraged agency in their own students while recalling past teachers who came to their aid too frequently and quickly. Together, these studies show that proportional representation results in a more diversified skill set within the teaching faculty — one that in turn benefits students with and without disabilities.

However, proportional representation that includes TWDs is valuable not only for the unique pedagogical perspective TWDs provide but also for their capacity to help create a transformative climate for teaching and learning to occur. The benefits to this type of inclusion are numerous and have been stated by various researchers. Not only do TWDs allow the school system the opportunity to question existing structures and barriers to inclusion in varied ways, but they also allow the exemplification of 'interdependence between disabled and non-disabled learners' (R. C. Anderson, 2006, p. 373), and encourage the use of classrooms as a representative model of a truly inclusive society (Vogel & Sharoni, 2011). The inclusion of TWDs, as part of the inclusion of a proportionally representative teaching staff, has the potential to change the very culture and system of the school itself.

Upon considering the aforementioned ideas, there is perhaps no timelier occasion than now to look at the development of a representative teaching force that includes TWDs as a bridge to full inclusion. Although the inclusion of all children in the classroom has received focused and concerted effort over the past number of years, the inclusion and education of TWDs is just emerging into the consciousness of researchers, faculties of education, and school officials. This has been an area of increasing curiosity for us, the authors, as seen in our past work (Sokal, Woloshyn, & Wilson, 2017).

To respond to the paucity of research relating to TWDs, particularly preservice TWDs in the practicum setting, we surveyed DSTs from across Canada to gain insight into their perceptions on barriers and supports that led to successful practicum placements for preservice TWDs (Sokal et al., 2017). Our recent findings demonstrated tensions that existed between accommodation and competency, as well as insights into inclusive practices. Key findings were

1. Types of disability affected DSTs' confidence in their legal and ethical decision-making for preservice TWDs on practicum.
2. Many DSTs used a team approach to problem-solving and planning for students with disabilities during and before practicum.
3. Prepracticum disclosures were seen as essential to providing effective accommodation.
4. Honest, although sometimes difficult, discussions were necessary.

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5. Many DSTs recognised that not everyone is capable of teaching, but some did not agree that conditions related to specific disabilities would prevent a student from successfully completing their practicum.

Although intriguing, our previous research revealed only the 'what' of current practices in the accommodation of preservice TWDs. In order to answer the 'why', we wanted to examine the topic through a focus group method. Specifically, we were interested in investigating whether there was evidence that DSTs were using a medical model or a constructionist model of disability in their decision-making when working with preservice TWDs during practicum.

Methods

Procedures

After formal ethics vetting was approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Winnipeg, Canada, and the formal vetting approval certificate was issued (HE#08353), a focus group methodology was selected for this study. Driscoll (2011) states that interview data are appropriate for learning detailed information from a small group of people. According to Gibbs (1997), '[It] is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic. The benefits ... include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life' (para. 1). The focus groups were recruited at the directors' meetings of the 2017 WestCAST conference held in British Columbia (BC), Canada. During the preconference meetings, a summary of the survey findings was presented to all DSTs from Western Canada who were in attendance ($N = 40$). The DSTs were then invited to attend a later focus group where the findings would be examined in depth by the participants. The DSTs who attended the focus group session were fully informed of the study procedures, and each signed a consent letter before beginning the study. The participants ($n = 14$) were five males and nine females. There was representation of DSTs from all Western provinces of Canada: Alberta, BC, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. In accordance with the criteria for focus group sizing proposed by Tang and Davis (1995), participants were then divided into two even groups for the 80-minute sessions. Each group was facilitated by one or more of the study's authors. Each group began with reviewing the findings, provided to the participants in writing, and then answered guiding questions intended to help us interpret the survey findings. To provoke deeper discussion about topics within a shared frame of reference, two practicum-based vignettes were also provided. Bailey (2008) found that vignettes were effective in fostering less encumbered discussions about controversial topics.

Analysis Strategy

Each focus group's audio recording was transcribed by the student co-author, who was trained in the expectations of confidentiality outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). Each researcher used the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) when analysing the data. The researchers independently began by working with each transcript separately using open (emergent within a transcript) coding and then axial (shared between transcripts) coding to generate themes. The three researchers — a preservice teacher, a professor of inclusive education, and a DST — met to conduct additional analysis using selective (convergent) coding across

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transcripts. Themes were shared, discussed, and evidence for each was examined. Points of divergence were negotiated by weighing the evidence within the transcripts.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the data generated from both focus groups, the medical model of disability (Creswell, 2007; Hahn, 1994) and in-group/out-group hierarchy (Kattari, 2015) are evident in the current teacher practicum system in Western Canada.

Barriers to Inclusion

Rigid use of standards. The DSTs we interviewed conducted their work within the context of provincial licensing standards, which differ from province to province and serve to ensure that competent preservice teachers are certified and incompetent preservice teachers are not. On the surface these standards seemed reasonable and necessary, but in some cases their rigid implementation served to maintain a social order that privileged those without disabilities. In trying to comply with a standard, which by its very nature creates an in-group and an out-group based on perceptions of competence, DSTs were faced with the challenge of fitting nonstandardised students into standardised expectations that they readily acknowledged:

> *It's a very different role to be the facilitator of a classroom. So I think sometimes there's difficulty in figuring out, this is one role, this is another, and where do I fit.*

Although standards help differentiate between competent and incompetent teachers (with and without disabilities), when applied too rigidly they may also capture competent teachers with disabilities into the latter group. This focus group finding is not anomalous. Riddick (2003) discussed the tensions that surround balancing teacher competency with equal opportunity, specifically for potential TWDs who have dyslexia. Likewise, DSTs in our study specifically discussed situations where the bureaucracy of the current teacher certification processes prevented some competent preservice TWDs from teaching in their desired classroom teaching students with disabilities:

> *We had a student a few years ago who was hearing impaired, and this year I have a student who is completely blind, and both students, and I think this is typical, their goal at the end of the process is to work with like students. And in order to do that, they need to get to a master's program that offers that specialty. But they can't get there without [passing their undergraduate] practicum in a regular setting. So, they can never get to where they want to get to.*

These types of situations were not atypical in the experiences of the DSTs in the focus groups. Their comments pointed to a tension between interpretations of standards that reasonably protect children's rights to be in safe and effective learning environments, and interpretations that serve only to replicate current models of 'teacher', which posit that 'a teacher is a teacher is a teacher'. Preservice teachers who could not demonstrate generalised skill sets within generalised settings, as expected by the standards, were prevented from access to specialised settings where their skill set would not be viewed as deficient, but could potentially be viewed as an asset. This viewpoint is supported by R. C. Anderson (2006), who encouraged the reframing of impairment within the context of human variation.

Other examples of the systemic construction of disability as a means to prevent access by the out-group were evident in interactions between DSTs and their provincial certification branches. Both preservice TWDs and DSTs were concerned that acceptance of accommodations by the preservice TWDs during practicum would affect the certification

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approval from accreditation authorities. We learned during the focus groups that some accommodations provided by DSTs that were viewed as reasonable by DSTs were viewed by some certification branches as unacceptable:

> *The impact on the student is potentially much greater, where from the university level we might feel that with this accommodation they've met the outcomes of the program and that we recommend them for certification, and then [the certification authority] could look at it and say 'well no, we don't certify half-time teachers'.*

Another participant from a different province concurred: 'For instance, if a student says, "I will only be able to work part time because of my health condition, that's all I ever want to do", and TRB [Teacher Regulation Branch] says "we don't certify part-time teachers"'.

These findings seemed counterintuitive to our research team, as preservice TWDs in our province are permitted to complete practicum requirements on a part-time basis, and we suspected that part-time teachers represent a fair share of teachers in every province. To verify this perception, we searched StatsCan data about trends in part-time and full-time employment of Canadian teachers and found that 'educators are also more likely than other workers to be employed part time or on a contractual basis ... Nearly 1 in 5 educators (20.9%) worked part time compared with 12.4% of workers overall' (Lin, 2005, 'More University Professors Working Under Contract', para. 1). We further investigated whether these trends held in BC, home of the TRB, where students completing their practicum on a part-time basis did not qualify for teacher certification. The BC Teachers' Federation reported that 'one in five (19.4%) teachers with a temporary or continuing contract position works part-time' (White, 2010, p. 11). Furthermore, 10% of BC teachers work part-time hours due to a disability, a work accommodation, and/or a rehabilitation program. Together, these statistics suggest that even though the TRB 'does not certify part-time teachers', over 20% of the teachers they certify do in fact work part-time, and half of those do so for reasons associated with disabilities. Together, these findings suggest that is not the certification standards *per se* that are problematic, rather it is a rigid and unreasonable interpretation of them that creates barriers. In situations where it is clear and demonstrable that competent teachers work in part-time roles, sometimes for reasons of disability, it is unreasonable to concurrently demand a higher interpretation of this standard from preservice teachers.

This new information highlights an interesting paradox and provides more evidence that the current certification standards can be applied too rigidly, in effect creating barriers to students with disabilities who are competent in some teaching positions but not others. In this regard, if the current standards do not reflect the current reality of teaching, what do they reflect? We suggest that they are more likely an artefact of other times rather than current practice, and the reluctance of certification boards to certify part-time teachers supports this viewpoint and maintains out-group status for some preservice TWDs. It is interesting to note that the Ministry of Education in BC is currently reviewing their teaching standards (found here at https://www.bcteacherregulation.ca/Standards/StandardsDevelopment.aspx) and is involving the various stakeholders in a consultation process about the potential revisions.

Schools controlling access to success. Other DSTs in our focus groups spoke about situations where the schools hosting the preservice TWDs during practicum created further barriers to success. DSTs acknowledged a tension between their responsibilities of maintaining good relationships with their host schools and their responsibilities to students and the profession. They expressed concern about potential damage to the ongoing

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relationship between the school and the DST when students with disabilities were struggling during the practicum:

> *And [the preservice TWD is] wonderful with children, they do some of the best work, and your heart goes out to these people, but the sponsor has said two times 'I can't work with this person'. So, in the meantime, you've alienated people in schools, you've got students that they've dealt with, and you've also got the honour of our profession. It's not good for our profession, to have situations that are not going to be successful.*

DSTs expressed fear that an unpleasant situation would result in loss of access to the practicum school:

> *. . . not wanting to destroy relationships with schools. We have two schools, where now it's difficult to go back, or to place another student. Four or five years ago, the [relationship between school and faculty] was burned, and now we're not able to go back.*

Conflict between host schools and DSTs was exacerbated by instances where disabilities are not disclosed to the DST before placement, and the school is surprised to receive a preservice TWD with no warning: 'I find it really hard to not, basically not disclose in advance. Because I think we end up looking bad in the end with placements'.

Disclosure as a double-edged sword. Although DSTs expressed concerns that providing preservice TWDs with accommodations during practicum would prevent them from qualifying for certification, they were simultaneously emphatic that it is imperative that preservice TWDs disclose their disability status to their teacher education practicum office to gain the benefits of disclosure. In Canada, DSTs must work within legal frameworks for providing accommodation, meaning students who do not disclose their disabilities have no legal right to accommodation. Thus, students who need accommodations to reasonably meet the standards are denied these supports unless they disclose as a doctor-certified member of the out-group. Some DSTs perceived that lack of disclosure resulted from lack of knowledge of accommodation processes or from fear of the negative effects of disclosure. One DST said, 'Some students come into the program and aren't aware of the kinds of [student services] supports that may be available to them'. If this interpretation is correct, it would serve university programs well to ensure that all students — not just those who disclose disabilities — are informed of the legal obligation for universities to provide accommodations and to describe the processes for accessing these supports, including during practicum.

Another interpretation of student nondisclosure posits that preservice TWDs are accurate judges of both their own needs as well as the ramifications of disclosure. Getzel (2008) described self-determination as

> *acceptance of a disability and how it affects learning; understanding which support services are needed; knowing how to describe one's disability and the need for certain supports to service providers; and having the determination to overcome obstacles that may be presented. (p. 210)*

Based on a large body of research literature, Field, Sarver, and Shaw (2003) saw self-determination as 'a central concept in service delivery for persons with disabilities across their lifespan', as well as 'a central organizing concept in postsecondary programs for all students with disabilities' (p. 339). It is possible that some preservice TWDs, based on their own experiences of discrimination, were demonstrating self-determination and judged the risks of disclosure as outweighing the benefits.

DSTs also reported that in some cases, the students were reluctant to accept help: 'I think there's also that component of students that just don't want to declare. It's a good portion of those students that don't'. One participant expressed the reasoning

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presented by a preservice TWD: '[The student] didn't necessarily want to disclose, and was concerned about how she would be perceived. Will I be a bad primary teacher?' The DSTs did acknowledge that disclosure (self-identifying with the out-group) is necessary to access services, but also recognised that this may lead to censure by the system regarding certification and acceptance by host schools. This acknowledgement is supported by past research, which has shown that teacher education programs are rife with discrimination (Ferri et al., 2001; Valle et al., 2004), and other more current research that shows that postsecondary students navigate their choices within this reality (Duquette, 2000; Sokal & Desjardins, 2016).

Together, the observations of the DSTs regarding tensions between the need for disclosure for preservice TWDs to be eligible for accommodation and the potential risks of disclosure to the students support Kattari's (2015) contention that the current system has put barriers in place that serve to replicate the current power differentials between the in-group and out-group.

Hopeful Progress

Despite the challenges of working within a system that they perceived as creating significant barriers to preservice TWDs, both from the certification branch and the host schools, DSTs demonstrated resourcefulness and flexibility in finding ways 'to make square pegs fit into round holes'. They challenged the notion that 'a teacher is a teacher is a teacher' and sought to carve out spaces where the environment was flexible and receptive to teachers with skill sets that were not generalised or typical.

Finding the 'fit'. DSTs reiterated the survey findings (Sokal et al., 2017) that depicted DSTs ensuring that the practicum sites chosen for preservice TWDs were a good fit for these particular students, considering 'fit' had the dual benefit of providing a structure in which preservice TWDs could experience success while ensuring the good health of the relationship between schools, faculties of education, and preservice teachers, both with and without disabilities:

> *And I know when I'm doing the placement, I have a little star by the person's name, like okay, I've got to put this person, necessarily in a spot, like not a tough, tough school. So, there are processes that are put in place that they benefit from.*

This observation suggests that not all schools are equally accepting of preservice TWDs and/or equal in challenge to the skill set of a student teacher. Furthermore, it suggests that the definition of successful teaching may be dependent on the specific teaching context and its fit with the preservice TWDs, therefore challenging the claim that the standards are enacted in identical ways across different teaching settings. The definition of 'teacher' as static and homogeneous is therefore challenged by the placement processes described by the DSTs, in that different placement options hold different conceptions of the teacher role, and a preservice TWD who may be deemed competent at one school may be deemed incompetent at another. By setting tighter parameters on the sites available to students with disabilities through purposely selecting sites willing to accept and support these students, the DSTs perceived that they were creating greater access to fairness for students while concurrently recognising that all placements do not allow students with disabilities a good fit for their skill set. Although these actions do ensure more fairness and access to preservice TWDs in the short-term, they do not challenge the long-term underlying structures that support the school settings that are more reluctant to accommodate the needs of diverse teaching populations.

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Noncertified teaching streams. Some participants described teaching roles outside the teacher certification stream where preservice TWDs might find more success. Although not available in all provinces represented, some provinces offered a noncertified teacher certificate that would not license a person to teach in K–12 classrooms but would allow access to other teaching roles:

> *Yes, [we have] lots of them [noncertifying programs]. We have a diploma in adult education — there are core courses and a bunch of electives. Then there is guidance studies, which is another ed diploma, a diploma in outdoor and environmental ed — you don't need a degree in ed to get into those ones. Early childhood is another diploma, along with special education, and teaching English as a second language. [For] the rest of them, you'd actually need to have a degree in education and be a certified K–12 teacher, like teacher-librarianship, or mathematics.*

When teacher candidates with disabilities are unsuccessful in fitting into current, generalised conceptualisations of schooling, they are directed to these other teaching roles where their skill sets meet the standards: 'It's only on the grace of good partnerships where people are saying "okay, how can we make this work?" So, is there a place for a noncertification stream, or a different certification stream?'

Together, the actions described by the DSTs to find matches between preservice TWDs skill sets and the skill set required for success in a specific practicum setting challenge the idea that teaching is a 'one-size-fits-all' profession. In their actions aimed to acknowledge the differences between different teaching settings as well as between different preservice teachers — both with disabilities and without — the DSTs indicate a willingness to blur the rigid lines of the stereotyped conceptualisations of teacher. In doing so, they re-envision a possibility of a different kind of teaching force — one where inclusion applies to both the students and the teachers.

Reframing categorical definitions of disability. Although many participants recognised that the teaching standards created barriers to access and success when applied rigidly, one participant challenged the existence of a firm line that should be used to separate preservice TWDs from those without, and suggested that accommodations might be suitable within both groups. This participant sought not only to blur the line between the categorical conceptualisations of the in-group and the out-group but also to question the very existence of a line. She alluded to ideas around universal design for learning that were discussed by a keynote speaker at the WestCAST conference (Moore, 2017). The speaker used a metaphor for universal design for learning related to bowling pins (see https://youtu.be/RYtUlU8MjlY). Moore (2017) stressed that our school systems should not be aimed at the easiest students to teach (the headpins), but rather at the most difficult (the endpins). In doing so, we create systems that work for all the students. This participant said,

> *I see it a little bit differently, because I think you've got accommodations for identified students, but it's a continuum. You've got the students that say, 'Yes, I have a diagnosis, I have an anxiety disorder'. But then you've got 12 other people in the cohort who are highly anxious. So, I'm always thinking, what processes do we put in place so that we're addressing that issue? It's, like, the bowling pins, those endpins, it's the same idea.*

This one DST challenged both categorical thinking about disability versus ability and also questioned the categorical way we accommodate one group of students and not the other. Like the student in Beckett's (2014) research on children's views on disability, the DST was able to 'question or deconstruct the normal/abnormal binary and to question whether disabled people are really the "other"' (p. 870).

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It should also be mentioned that although the majority of DSTs demonstrated their strong support of multiple paths to inclusion for preservice TWDs, these attitudes existed on a continuum of support with respect to enhancing diversity within the teaching profession. Some DSTs tended to view the profession as more homogenous and static than others:

> *Well, these are the conditions of teaching. And is this the right profession for you? There are lots of ways to be involved with children and with education, but a classroom K–12 teacher, this is what that profession looks like.*

However, some others, such as the DST who challenged categorical thinking about disability and accommodation, showed a willingness to disrupt the status quo and look for new ways to envision teaching and variation in ability.

Limitations

All research has limitations, and ours is no exception. The first limitation is the composition of the focus groups. These individuals were self-selected and therefore may not have represented the views of those who chose not to attend. Generalisability is therefore restricted. Second, it should be remembered that each participant was speaking in front of colleagues and peers. Although this served to cross-inform perspectives within the group, the lack of confidentiality may have silenced some comments that might have been shared in individual interviews.

Conclusions

The experiences and perceptions shared by the DSTs suggest that current standards and practices of practicum expectations for preservice TWDs, when applied rigidly, serve to reify unreasonable and perhaps undesirable expectations of homogeneity in our teaching force. When used in this way, the standards support a narrow definition of the competent teacher, therefore sustaining a privileged position for teachers without disabilities while subordinating the position of TWDs. The DSTs we studied included individuals who are re-envisioning a more diverse teaching force. However, these DSTs faced obstructions built to maintain the status quo of the current system. Evidence showed that the DSTs we studied navigated a balancing act between standards and fairness. Furthermore, they questioned some of the current structures that define the in-group/out-group dichotomy, and they worked in overt and covert ways to try to expand the notion of teacher. This observation suggests that the DSTs in our study viewed the current system as socially constructed and therefore malleable. This gives us hope that a more representative teaching force through fairer, more flexible teaching practicum practices may soon be on the horizon. The DSTs' efforts to challenge the current definitions of teacher during practicum experiences are important, as true inclusion will not become a reality in our schools until all members are representatively diverse, including teachers.

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