

*Preparing Preservice Teachers for Inclusive Classrooms: A State-Wide Survey of Teacher Education Faculty*

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*Abstract*

Faculty (N = 154) from approved Tennessee teacher education programs across the range of disciplines responded to an online survey designed to assess the extent to which they practice, teach, and express confidence in co-teaching, collaboration and implementation of universal design for learning (UDL). Faculty strongly endorsed items indicating they practice, teach, have confidence in, and receive departmental support for collaboration and UDL. In contrast, faculty less strongly endorsed items on their practice, teaching, confidence, and departmental support for co-teaching. General education faculty reported less practice of ( $p < .01$ ) and confidence in ( $p < .01$ ) co-teaching than special education faculty. From open-ended responses, major obstacles identified were lack of time, separation of general and special education departments, “buy-in”, and lack of skill in and knowledge of those practices. Results confirm the need for cross-discipline collaboration between general and special teacher education faculty to ensure candidate preparation for effective inclusive practice.

**Keywords:** teacher education faculty, teacher preparation, co-teaching, collaboration, Universal Design for Learning

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While federal policies and laws have aimed much of the accountability spotlight on schools and teachers, the spotlight is slowly but surely shifting to educator preparation programs [Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 2015, Individual with Disabilities Improvement Education Act or IDEIA (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)]. Gone is the one-size-fits-all approach in classrooms and, instead, the era of specially designed, individualized programs for all students has been ushered in. Graduates of teacher education programs, both general and special educators, are expected to hit the ground running together when they enter a school and, increasingly, teacher preparation programs are expected to provide evidence of their effectiveness based on their graduates’ effectiveness as teachers [e.g., see Standard 4 (“Program Impact”) of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013].

To provide clarity for the reader, the following are definitions of the main constructs addressed in this study:

1. *Universally Designed Learning*: “Universal Design for Learning (UDL) recognizes that every learner is unique and processes information differently...UDL provides a framework to create and implement lessons with flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that support learning for all students” (The Center for Applied Special Technology, 1999).
2. *Inclusive classroom*: The inclusive classroom can be defined as having students with disabilities ‘primarily in the general education classroom, under the responsibility of the general classroom teacher’ (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010, p. 7).
3. *Co-teaching*: Co-teaching can be defined as two teachers, usually a general educator and a special educator, sharing ‘instructional responsibility for a diverse group of students that usually includes several with disabilities or other special needs’ (Friend, 2007, p. 49).
4. *Collaboration*: Collaboration can be defined as “co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in decision-making as they work toward a common goal” (Cook & Friend, 1991, p. 25). For the purpose of this study, collaboration was further defined to be: communication between special educators and non-special educators on how to best serve the needs of a diverse group of students, including but not limited to, those with disabilities.

Research on education faculty’s knowledge and practices in preparing teachers across disciplines and grade levels to teach in inclusive settings reveals inconsistent approaches across programs (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010; Voltz & Elliott, 1997). Pugach and Blanton (2009) asked “Are collaborative structures of teacher education transforming the preservice curriculum and how faculty conceptualize teaching the full range of students, or do they instead function to maintain traditional views of teacher education with merely some tinkering around the edges?” (p. 581). As K-12 general and special educators increasingly work together to ensure achievement of their students, it seems reasonable, even imperative, that faculty collaborate across disciplines to present a unified approach in preparing new teachers for the field. This study was designed to assess the extent to which faculty are incorporating validated practices in teacher education programs to prepare preservice teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms.

Including students with disabilities in general education classrooms has become the norm, not the exception. According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), from the years 1990 to 2012, the percentage of students with disabilities who are educated 80% or more of the time in the general education classroom has risen from 33.1% to 61.2% (2016). In addition, approximately 11% of new teachers were employed in team-teaching or “pull-in/pull-out” positions (NCES, 2010) which are commonly utilized to serve students with disabilities.

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) in *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do*, likened the teaching profession to the

medical profession. One key disposition doctors need to have is the ability to diagnose and treat a disease, not simply based on what was learned from a textbook but in the context of the individual person and his/her history. In addition, doctors often work in teams (with other doctors, nurses, physician's assistants, etc.) rather than individually. Similarly, teachers need to be able to do more than simply transmit the information of their specific disciplines; they should know how to base instructional decisions on the context of their classrooms, addressing needs and interests of a diverse range of students. And, they need to be able to collaborate with other professionals in order to make sound decisions and use effective classroom practices.

Further, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) argued that because our schools exist within a democracy, it is important that all have equal access to the instruction given within. Institutions charged with preparing teachers need to ensure teacher candidates are learning practices that accomplish this purpose. Regarding diversity, Darling-Hammond and Bransford asserted that teachers should be "building an inclusive practice" (p. 255). To accomplish this task, teacher preparation programs must keep diverse learners as a central focus throughout coursework and field experiences. Importantly, if teachers are better prepared to address diverse learners in the classroom, the strategies they gain and learn to use mean better classroom teaching for all.

Arthur Levine (2006) also addressed the importance of educating all learners. In one of his series of policy reports on America's schools, *Educating School Teachers*, which focused on the education of classroom teachers, he concluded:

*...today's teachers need to know and be able to do things their predecessors did not. They have to be prepared to educate all of their students to achieve the highest learning outcomes in history. This is a fundamentally different job than that of past generations of teachers (p. 11).*

Faculty acknowledge that more should be done to model the practices of co-teaching, collaboration, and best practices for inclusive environments, but there has not been a comprehensive approach for how to accomplish this (Arndt & Liles, 2010; Harvey et al., 2010; McHatton & Daniel, 2008; McKenzie, 2009).

Several researchers have examined teacher education curriculum and coursework in the context of preparing candidates to educate students with disabilities. McCray and McHatton (2011) investigated perceptions of pre-service general education teachers about including students with disabilities in general education classrooms via a survey taken prior to and after a course on integrating students with disabilities into general education. Preservice teachers' perceptions increased from pre to post survey (pre  $M = 3.94$ , post  $M = 4.31$ ), but they voiced concerns over not having enough training in strategies and accommodations. The authors concluded that "teacher educators can only strengthen programs by building relationships across disciplines. Instructional strategies and accommodations that seamlessly grant students with disabilities maximum access to the general education curriculum should naturally be infused in methods courses" (p. 151).

Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson (2013) reviewed coursework for elementary teacher education programs in 109 universities from across the country for four identified competencies they deemed necessary for general educators' success in inclusive classrooms. They found the following percentages of specific courses devoted to the competencies as follows: a) basic knowledge of characteristics and needs of students with disabilities, 33%, b) ability to differentiate instruction, 27%, c) classroom and behavior management skills, 41%, and d) ability to collaborate effectively with special educators, 6%. Overall, between 7-10% of coursework was specifically dedicated to educating students with disabilities in inclusive settings. According to Allday et al., "it is evident that many university teacher preparation programs in elementary education are allocating minimal coursework to issues related to disabilities and may not be adequately preparing their graduates for entry into today's inclusive schools" ( p. 306). Their findings suggest a "possible disconnect between what preservice teachers are taught and what they face as practicing teachers" (p. 308).

Recognizing the importance of collaboration to successful inclusive teaching, several researchers have investigated practices and beliefs of teacher education faculty. McKenzie (2009) surveyed special education teacher educators ( $N = 53$ ); he reported that preservice special educators are better prepared to engage in collaborative roles and value collaboration more highly than preservice general educators. According to McKenzie, the "splintered manner in which collaboration is addressed in many pre-service programs not only hinders but also likely precludes the production of skilled collaborators"(p. 391). Similarly, Harvey, et al.(2010) concluded that the limited exposure preservice teachers have to collaboration at the preparation level perhaps contributes to the difficulties then encountered at the P-12 level and that teacher educators need to develop a shared vision across disciplines to provide opportunities for co-teaching and collaboration. They surveyed 124 teacher educators from across the country; 70% reported that co-taught classes were not offered at their institution and that more resources, money, time, and co-teaching opportunities would assist efforts to prepare preservice teachers for inclusion and co-teaching.

Responding to a request from area superintendents to have better prepared general education teachers for inclusive classrooms, Cooper, Kurtts, Baber, and Vallecorsa (2008) surveyed 73 faculty who had taught a key general education course in the last two years. Approximately 36% of faculty reported their own knowledge and skills in how to prepare preservice teachers to work with students with disabilities was "extremely limited" to "somewhat limited" with 26% reporting "not at all" to "very little." In addition, the need for resources and funding to support faculty development and collaborative opportunities across disciplines was noted. Grenot-Scheyer, Coots, and Bishop-Smith (2004) examined federal reforms and mandates, three teacher preparation programs and their responses to calls for collaborative, inclusive teachers, and discussed the lessons learned that could frame teacher preparation responses. They reminded us that any student, whether one with a disability or not, should be central in decisions made and it is important that this focus not be lost. They suggested the need to establish connections across disciplines that are meaningful and purposeful, the need to ensure that

field experiences are supervised and chosen thoughtfully to provide the best exposure and practice, and that support from the top down is essential. They further concluded that classrooms at the university level reflect P-12 classrooms which are home to both general and special education teachers and students.

Researchers in teacher preparation programs have not examined systematically how and if programs have changed in response to changing legal requirements, professional standards, and realities of the P-12 environment. The literature review reveals a gap in the research of teacher educators' use of effective practices for preparing preservice teachers for inclusive classrooms. Available research suggests there is a disconnect between what is taught in preparation programs and what new teachers encounter at the P-12 level, and that viewpoints of general and special education faculty may differ on what preservice teachers even need in their preparation. Though some teacher preparation programs do have a partnership between general and special education faculty, collaboration within others can be minimal at best. This study was designed to determine the extent to which teacher educators in a southeastern state practice/use, teach, and are confident about the practices of co-teaching, collaboration, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 1999). The researchers hope to help define more specifically current practices in teacher preparation programs and identify potential changes needed to further the preparation of all teachers for today's inclusive, collaborative classrooms.

### *Method*

#### **Participants**

The target population of the study was faculty, both special and general education, of teacher education departments in a southeastern state. Twenty-five of the state's 36 approved Education Preparation Providers (EPPs) opted to allow its faculty to participate in the study. Size of the education faculty of the 25 EPPs participating ranged from one to 49. The average ratio of general education faculty to special education faculty was 18 to 3 or 86% general education faculty to 14% special education faculty. In addition, the average gender ratio of female to male faculty for these institutions was 10 to 5 or 66% female to 34% male faculty. The 25 EPPs varied from large, public, research universities to small, private, liberal arts colleges and had a total of 481 full time faculty members; 154 completed the survey (a 32% response rate) with a ratio of 110 (74%) general education faculty to 38 (26%) special education faculty (six chose not to specify discipline) and 118 (77%) female to 36 (26%) male faculty. Consequently, the demographic characteristics of the participating sample were adequately representative of faculty in the institutions surveyed.

#### **Survey Instrument**

The Survey of Teacher Educator Practices: Students with Disabilities (STEP: SWD) contains 24 closed-ended items comprised of scales and subscales: The Practice, Teaching, and Confidence in Collaboration, Co-teaching, and UDL (PTC scale) has 15 items with three subscales of five items each, Practice Subscale, Teaching Subscale, and Confidence Subscale. In addition, the Department Support for Collaboration Subscale has three items and the Use of Co-Teaching Models Subscale has six items. All 24 closed-ended items are forced-response (Practice, Teaching, Confidence and Department

Support are Likert type answers with choices from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and the Use of Co-Teaching items have 5 choices ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (every class). Participants could opt not to respond to the 11 demographic questions (e.g. discipline taught, size and type of institution, years teaching, age, gender). Finally, the survey contains five optional open-ended items: a) three on obstacles to implementing collaboration, co-teaching, and UDL; and b) two requesting examples of co-teaching and UDL used in coursework.

Several indicators of psychometric adequacy of the STEP: SWD were determined. Cronbach's alpha (a commonly used measure of internal consistency reliability) was calculated for the 24 closed-ended items ( $\alpha = .89$ ), indicating relatively strong internal consistency. Further, correlations of items assessing similar constructs (practice, teaching, and confidence; department support; and use of co-teaching models) were calculated and indicated large correlations in an expected manner (range of correlations:  $\alpha = .70$  to  $.92$ ). Two additional sources of evidence for validity of the survey included review and feedback from experts; and content validity, i.e., content of items was drawn from professional literature.

### ***Results and Discussion***

One of the goals of this study was to determine the extent to which faculty practice collaboration, co-teaching, and implement UDL, and then to determine if there were significant differences when faculty were divided into separate categories of general and special education faculty (see Table 1 for a summary of descriptive statistics). Results indicate that most faculty report they practice collaboration and UDL, but report less that they co-teach. In general, collaboration at the university level is a professional expectation. UDL is still a relatively new concept but it is gaining in use and is seen more and more frequently from the arenas of legislation (National UDL Task Force, 2012) to that of standardized testing (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2013). Collaboration and UDL are relatively easy to include in typical preservice coursework. The finding on co-teaching also is not surprising. Co-teaching at the university level is not unheard-of (Bacharach et al., 2008), but it is certainly not the norm as Harvey et al. (2010) found in a survey in which 70% of faculty reported that their institutions did not offer co-taught classes, as well as the results of Arndt and Liles' (2010) study showing the need for teacher educators to more closely model concepts such as co-teaching.

Another goal was to determine the extent to which faculty report they teach about collaboration, co-teaching, and UDL, and then determine if there were significant differences when comparing general and special education faculty. Mean scores indicated similar results as reported in the foregoing paragraph with most faculty reporting they teach about collaboration and UDL and fewer saying they teach about co-teaching. Those who teach special education more strongly agreed that they teach co-teaching. The third goal was to determine the extent to which faculty report confidence in their knowledge of and skills in collaboration, co-teaching, and UDL, and then if there were any significant differences between general and special education faculty. Mean scores indicated most

faculty report confidence in all three; however, special education faculty expressed stronger confidence in co-teaching.

**Table 1**  
*Summary of Descriptive Statistics for the Practice, Teaching, and Confidence in Collaboration, Co-Teaching, and UDL Scale (Practice Subscale) for Total Sample, and for General Education (GenEd) and Special Education (SpEd) Participants*

Practice Subscale	<i>M</i> <i>n</i> = 154	<i>SD</i>	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	<i>M (SD)</i> <i>GenEd</i> <i>n</i> = 110	<i>M (SD)</i> <i>SpEd</i> <i>n</i> = 38
			<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)		
1.I collaborate with colleagues	4.42	0.92	5 (3.2%)	4 (2.6%)	4 (2.6%)	49 (31.8%)	92 (59.7%)	4.39 (.90)	4.53 (1.03)
2.I model co-teaching	3.22	1.16	12 (7.8%)	34 (22.1%)	36 (23.4%)	52 (33.8%)	20 (13%)	3.29 (1.18)	3.03 (1.13)
3.I use multiple methods of presentation when planning and implementing my own lessons	4.49	.86	4 (2.6%)	4 (2.6%)	1 (0.6%)	48 (31.2%)	97 (63%)	4.54 (.84)	4.45 (.95)
4.I use multiple methods of engagement when planning and implementing my own lessons	4.55	.71	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	1 (0.6%)	53 (34.4%)	96 (62.3%)	4.64 (.63)	4.37 (.88)
5.I use multiple methods of assessment when planning and implementing my own lessons	4.44	.75	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	6 (3.9%)	61 (39.6%)	83 (53.9%)	4.47 (.69)	4.39 (.92)
Practice Overall	4.22	.64	5 (3.24%)	9.2 (5.98%)	9.6 (6.22)	52.6 (34.16%)	77.6 (50.38%)	4.27 (.85)	4.15 (.98)
<b>Teach Subscale</b>									
6.I teach the principle of collaboration in my coursework	4.28	.95	4 (2.6%)	6 (3.9%)	11 (7.1%)	55 (35.7%)	78 (50.6%)	4.28 (.90)	4.37 (1.08)
7. I teach the principle of co-teaching in my coursework	3.68	1.17	9 (5.8%)	19 (12.3%)	26 (16.9%)	58 (37.7%)	42 (27.3%)	3.60 (1.15)	4.08 (1.15)
8.I teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of presentation in their lessons	4.42	.84	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.3%)	11 (7.1%)	49 (31.8%)	89 (57.8%)	4.45 (.81)	4.50 (.89)
9. I teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of engagement in their lessons	4.42	.85	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.3%)	12 (7.8%)	47 (30.5%)	90 (58.4%)	4.44 (.82)	4.53 (.89)
10. I teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of assessment in their lessons	4.33	.91	3 (1.9%)	5 (3.2%)	13 (8.4%)	50 (32.5%)	83 (53.9%)	4.32 (.89)	4.53 (.89)
Teach Overall	4.23	.78	4.4 (2.82%)	6.8 (4.4%)	14.6 (9.46%)	51.8 (33.64%)	76.4 (49.6%)	4.22 (.91)	4.40 (.98)
<b>Confidence Subscale</b>									

11.I am confident in my ability to incorporate the principle of collaboration in my coursework	4.42	.77	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	9 (5.8%)	58 (37.7%)	83 (53.9%)	4.45 (.70)	4.47 (.89)
12.I am confident in my ability to incorporate the principle of co-teaching in my coursework	4.02	.95	4 (2.6%)	7 (4.5%)	23 (14.9%)	68 (44.2%)	52 (33.8%)	3.95 (.94)	4.34 (.91)
13.I am confident in my ability to teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of presentation in their lessons	4.49	.79	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.3%)	5 (3.2%)	51 (33.1%)	93 (60.4%)	4.48 (.74)	4.61 (.95)
14.I am confident in my ability to teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of engagement in their lessons	4.53	.75	3 (1.9%)	0 (0%)	6 (3.9%)	48 (31.2%)	97 (63%)	4.55 (.66)	4.63 (.94)
15.I am confident in my ability to teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of assessment in their lessons	4.40	.80	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	12 (7.8%)	54 (35.1%)	84 (54.5%)	4.41 (.76)	4.53 (.86)
Confidence Overall	4.37	.69	2.8 (1.8%)	2.6 (1.68%)	11 (7.12%)	55.8 (36.26%)	81.8 (53.12%)	4.37 (.76)	4.52 (.91)

Both closed- and open- ended items were used to assess collaborative practices among the surveyed faculty (see Table 2 for a summary of descriptive statistics). Most faculty agreed or strongly agreed that their department provides support and level of support does not vary based on general versus special education status. This finding is interesting when compared to findings by Harvey et al. (2010), McKenzie (2009), and Cooper et al. (2008), who all concluded that a more collaborative culture with more opportunities for faculty collaboration needs to be incorporated at the university level. Despite acknowledgement of strong departmental support for collaboration, open-ended responses by participants in this study identified time as an obstacle to collaboration (30% by both general and special education faculty); in addition, 38% of special education faculty cited separate departments as another obstacle.

Table 2  
*Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Department Support Subscale for Total Sample, and for General Education (Gen Ed) and Special Education (SpEd) Participants*

Department Support Subscale	<i>M</i> <i>N</i> = 154	<i>SD</i>	1 Strongly Disagree <i>f</i> (%)	2 Disagree <i>f</i> (%)	3 Neutral <i>f</i> (%)	4 Agree <i>f</i> (%)	5 Strongly Agree <i>f</i> (%)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) <i>Gen Ed</i> <i>n</i> = 110	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) <i>SpEd</i> <i>n</i> = 38
1.My department/program values collaboration between colleagues on how to best prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of all students	4.31	.97	5 (3.2%)	6 (3.9%)	7 (4.5%)	54 (35.1%)	82 (53.2%)	4.33 (.99)	4.29 (.98)
2.My department/program provides or encourages formal professional development opportunities (e.g. workshops, conferences) on how to best prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of all students	4.13	1.07	5 (3.2%)	10 (6.5%)	18 (11.7%)	48 (31.2%)	73 (47.4)	4.14 (1.03)	4.11 (1.25)



3. My department/program provides or encourages informal professional development opportunities (e.g., faculty meetings, sessions led by colleagues) on how to best prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of all students.	4.10	1.07	6 (3.9%)	9 (5.8%)	18 (11.7%)	52 (33.8%)	69 (44.8%)	4.10 (1.05)	4.16 (1.18)
Overall	4.18	.91	11 (3.43%)	8.33 (5.4%)	14.3 (9.3%)	51.3 (33.37%)	74.7 (48.47%)	4.20 (1.02)	4.19 (1.14)

As with collaborative practices, both closed- and open-ended items were used to assess co-teaching practices of surveyed faculty (see Table 3 for a summary of descriptive statistics). Not surprisingly, there was a significant difference with faculty who more strongly indicate practicing co-teaching also more likely to indicate the use of co-teaching models. In describing obstacles to incorporating co-teaching within education coursework, similar responses were obtained from faculty with the largest reported theme again separation of disciplines (39% general education to 41% special education) and the second lack of time. This finding reiterates those of studies above: separation of disciplines and lack of time are major contributing factors in implementing either collaboration or co-teaching. In addition, it is interesting to note that special educators indicated more frequently than general educators a lack of knowledge/skill in co-teaching (21% special educators, 12% general educators) as well as a lack of “buy in” to the idea of co-teaching (21% special educators, .07% general educators) as obstacles. When asked to give examples of how they incorporate co-teaching within their coursework, 46% of general educators and 57% of special educators provided acceptable examples. The majority of remaining answers were not unacceptable; instead, participants stated they did not practice it (35% to 26% respectively), which again echoes findings of other studies (Arndt & Liles, 2010; Harvey et al., 2010) indicating faculty co-teaching is simply not a common practice.

Table 3

*Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Use of Co-Teaching Models Subscale Total Sample, and for General Education (Gen Ed) and Special Education (SpEd) Participants*

Use of Co-Teaching Models Subscale	M n = 154	SD	1 Never	2 One class per semester	3 Several classes in a semester	4 One class every week	5 Every class	M (SD) Gen Ed n = 110	M (SD) SpEd n = 38
Identify how often you use the following models of co-teaching:			f(%)	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)	f(%)		
1. One teach, one observe (one teacher leads large-group instruction while the other gathers data on specific students or the class group)	1.73	.96	88 (57.1%)	26 (16.9%)	34 (22.1%)	5 (3.2%)	1 (0.6%)	1.76 (.98)	1.63 (.85)
2. One teach, one assist (one teacher leads instruction while the other circulates among the students offering individual assistance)	1.92	1.03	76 (49.4%)	24 (15.6%)	46 (29.9%)	6 (3.9%)	2 (1.3%)	1.95 (1.07)	1.82 (.90)
3. Parallel teaching (each teacher has half the class, present the same material for the primary purpose of fostering instructional differentiation and increasing student participation)	1.51	.86	106 (68.8%)	22 (14.3%)	22 (14.3%)	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	1.55 (.88)	1.39 (.72)

The number one response faculty gave to obstacles of implementing UDL was that there were no obstacles (36% general educators to 48% special educators). The second themed response was lack of time and the third was lack of skill and/or knowledge. Participants were also asked to give examples of how they incorporate UDL principles in their coursework. Of the participants who chose to answer this question, 99% of general educators and 100% of special educators provided acceptable examples. Encouragingly, it appears that UDL is being incorporated in education coursework for both general and special education preservice teachers and that, at least for this sample of the population, it is understood and correct examples are utilized.

### *Implications*

What do these results mean for teacher educator preparation programs? If one operates from the premise that the goal of preparing teacher candidates is to ensure they are ready for differing needs at the P-12 level, then modeling educator preparation to mirror realities in P-12 schools seems an obvious response. The practices of collaboration and co-teaching, and the principles of UDL are now a part of the vocabulary and practice of our P-12 schools and teacher preparation institutions need to be in sync. Studies on the training preservice teachers receive on the principles of collaboration, co-teaching, and UDL reveal that when explicitly incorporated into teacher education programs, attitudes and ability increase (Bacharach et al., 2010; Laarhoven et al., 2006; Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon, 2005; Spooner et al., 2003). However, researchers have also shown that inaccurate expectations of competencies needed in classrooms exist in preservice teacher candidates based on differing experiences in coursework and/or fieldwork (Arndt & Liles, 2010; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Wasburn-Moses, 2009). Differences in general and special education faculty approaches have contributed to this confusion and lack of commonalities between the two disciplines (Cooper et al., 2008; Harvey et al., 2010; McHatton & Daniel, 2008; McKenzie, 2009).

Results of this study suggest that faculty are more familiar with and better prepared to practice and teach collaboration and UDL than they are to co-teach. And, special education faculty report they teach more and are more confident about co-teaching than general education faculty. In addition, because two of the most frequent responses for obstacles to collaboration and co-teaching are time and separation of disciplines, results seem to indicate that faculty from the two disciplines need to spend more time deliberately collaborating with one another in order to better incorporate these practices in teacher education programs. Results suggest that the practice of co-teaching needs to increase at the educator preparation level, specifically with faculty from both general and special education together. In order for cross-discipline co-teaching to occur, support needs to come from within the department (or departments). Paradoxically, though responses indicate that most faculty surveyed believe that their department supports efforts to collaborate, one of the most reported obstacles to collaboration and co-teaching is separate departments/classes/schedules. It seems that one of the single most important hurdles is overcoming the limitations placed on departments when general and special education faculty operate as separate entities.

### ***Limitations***

One of the limitations of this study is that responses were self-reported by faculty. In addition, while leaders from all institutions across the state were invited to participate, only those whose department heads/chairs chose to accept the invitation on their behalf participated. These factors somewhat limit the generalizability of the findings to all teacher education institutions.

While wording on the survey indicated that any question about collaboration or co-teaching was in reference to that between general and special educators on how to best serve students with disabilities, it is possible that participants did not answer this question based on that provision but instead were referring to any type of collaboration or co-teaching.

### ***Recommendations***

Rather than incorporate some large-scale redrawing of the blueprint of teacher education programs, collaboration within and across departments at the university level might go far in better preparing preservice educators for the climate of today's schools. While some at the P-12 level are dually certified, for the most part teachers are certified in specific disciplines and are being asked to collaborate to create the best possible learning environment for their students. Is it too much to ask faculty to do the same thing? This should be teacher educators' simple goal: to prepare teachers who are able to effectively educate all students in the classroom. Collaborating at the higher education level seems imperative in order to effectively model for preservice teachers' best practices that best serve all students in today's classrooms.

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