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Developing and Maintaining Inclusive Identities: Understanding Student Teaching through de Certeau’s Framework of Tactics and Strategies

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**ABSTRACT**

The article describes how a group of student teachers understood and enacted inclusion in noninclusive school placements during a year-long teaching residency. It examines, within de Certeau’s framework of tactics and strategies, how students made meaning of their placements, their understanding of university practice in relation to inclusion, and their developing teaching identities as inclusive educators. The fissure between university and school praxis, and the student’s relationship to that disconnect, is at the heart of this research. Moreover, the tension between the participants’ pedagogical underpinnings of what constitutes effective teaching practice and the ways they experienced their school sites through the adoption of an inclusive ideological framework, informed how participants resisted and negotiated daily interactions within established systems and structures.

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Teacher preparation; inclusive education; teacher identity

**Introduction**

This study examines how student teachers made meaning of their placements, their understanding of university practice in relation to inclusion, and their developing identities as inclusive educators. We begin with how Cara made sense of her placement and her perspective on what it meant to be inclusive:

I have a classroom that follows best practices when it comes to inclusion. But it is [only] one class with two amazing teachers that I work with … [and] the rest of it [other classrooms] is obviously segregated, like separate desks and separate tables even inside of inclusive classrooms.

What did Cara envision inclusion should look and feel like for the students she was teaching? What were these two teachers doing that she considered illustrative of best practice? And how did she as a student teacher negotiate practices that did not ideologically fit with what she was learning at her university. What Cara described is the disconnect between what students learn in university courses as best practice and what is actually happening within their schools (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009; Zeichner, 2010). This reality, the fissure between university theory and school practice, and the students’ relationship to and understanding of that disconnect, is what drives this study.

We discuss the particular practices of inclusion that student teachers utilized during their year-long placement in a clinically rich graduate program. When we began this project, we had plans to unpack effective teaching and how participants defined “good” teaching, but it became clear that “effective” was tied directly to perspectives regarding what it meant to be an inclusive educator and how that meaning was being conferred to the student teachers within this program. The student...
teachers believed that they could only be effective if they were attempting to practice inclusion. However, because school sites were not wholly inclusive, student teachers employed covert methods to enact inclusion. Their placement schools did not have systems in place to fully support inclusive service delivery and practice. This tension pushed us to think about how student teachers resist and negotiate their emerging pedagogical commitments and identities within established school systems and the universities in which they were enrolled.

We utilize de Certeau’s (1984) conception of tactics to frame the negotiations that student teachers engaged in to maintain their developing inclusive identities. Briefly, these methods of brokering life, methods that de Certeau calls “tactics” are “dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances” (1984, p. 29). Tactics are “calculated action[s] determined by the absence of a proper locus … the space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by a law of a foreign power” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37). As Ollin (2005) suggests, tactics reflect the “subtle and complex interplay between external factors and individual agency which operates on a daily basis throughout the education system” (p. 151). Teachers generally work within “constructive subversions,” which are small-scale tactics that are exercised by individuals and groups working within existing systems of power, to maintain themselves and their beliefs while affecting small changes in their environment (Ollin, 2005). These constructive subversions provide individuals opportunities to “retain what they consider is important, and by doing so, to some measure at least, the external pressures for them to act otherwise” (Ollin, 2005, p. 160). Thus, for individuals to work within established systems, they have to negotiate their roles and identities through the use of tactics. According to de Certeau:

Dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances, these transverse tactics do not obey the law of the place, [and] they are not defined or identified by it. In this respect, they are not any more localizable than the technocratic (and scriptural) strategies that seek to create in conformity with abstract models. But what distinguishes them at the same time concerns the types of operations and role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these paces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert their spaces. (1984, p. 30)

These tactics differ from more systematic approaches that de Certeau (1984) labels strategies, “Strategies are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power are “capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed” (p. 38). Strategies work in opposition to tactics, as they are based on developing a purview of power in which a group gains some semblance of control and alters the established structures and systems toward their will (de Certeau, 1984). Strategies are, therefore, dependent on the place of power for their existence, as they manifest within and through the perpetuation of cultural and social products. Strategies demand power, whereas tactics are only viable through “circumstances [in] which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37). Those who engage in tactics, thus, hold little power and depend on opportunity, much like our student teachers. The actions teachers engage in to negotiate systems and power in schools are highly dependent on their developing identities as teachers. We hope that this article will serve as an opportunity to discuss models of teacher preparation that can help sustain new teachers’ identity development as they enter the field.

We begin with a review of literature on teacher identity theories, including resistance theories. Second, we describe the overall aspects of the master’s program in which the students were enrolled. We then discuss the methods utilized to investigate the agency our student teachers were able to exercise. Finally, we describe the tactics that the students engaged in and the meaning they conferred to those practices.

**Related Literature**

Much research has examined the role of professional teacher identity formation (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Olsen, 2008; Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010). Overall, teacher identity theories suggest that the development of a teaching identity is an ongoing process that must be situated and reinterpreted within a teacher’s
own understandings and experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Musanti & Pence, 2010; Sutherland et al., 2010; Young, 2011). As such, the reflexive nature of teaching identity is directly tied to what discourses are made available to teachers over the course of their lives (Musanti & Pence, 2010). The “teacher self” develops over time and is a result of the interactions between the person and her or his environment (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Sachs, 2000). Experiences that mold teaching identity can include teachers’ own schooling autobiographies, what they learned about teaching within teacher preparation, and how they understood teaching after entering the field. Teacher education programs can be utilized as sites to develop teachers who are critical of current public school practices and systems to support their identities outside of traditional lines.

Teacher education programs that ask students to engage in critical reflection of their own schooling, issues of privilege, and what school benefits help expose teacher candidates to new ways of thinking. Such programs ask teacher education students to “analyze their assumptions that they have developed through their life experiences in schools, family life, with dominant culture, and with their own culture” (Oyler, 2011, p. 7). Consequently, individual teachers become influenced and, often times, molded by this acquisition of knowledge that disrupts their understandings about teaching and the oppressive systems that privilege certain students and knowledges. For example, when education programs ask teacher candidates to critically evaluate curriculum, they may notice a White and middle-class point of view overwhelmingly represented, whereas other groups’ experiences are noticeably less present (Peters & Reid, 2009). This illumination may help teacher candidates question who school privileges and may therefore lead to their perpetuation or disruption of the system.

Teacher education programs, particularly those grounded in disability studies, can practice critical pedagogy within a wide range of areas, including approaches to educating students with disabilities. A critical element of such programs includes specific reflection on and practice in understanding and internalizing inclusive practice and philosophy. Inclusion, as defined by Udvari-Solner (1997), states that:

Inclusive schooling propels a critique of contemporary school culture and thus, encourages practitioners to reinvent what can be and should be to realize more humane, just and democratic learning communities. Inequities in treatment and educational opportunity are brought to the forefront, thereby fostering attention to human rights, respect for difference and value of diversity. (p. 142)

This attention to inclusive education as a human right and a cornerstone of democratic education can be seen as contradictory to traditional models of special education where the focus is on identification and remediation of difference. These programs, therefore, teach about inclusion not as a place or a service, but as a philosophy, in which the practice of teaching demands innovative thinking to unpack and disrupt culturally normative practices (Ashby, 2012; Oyler, 2011; Peters & Reid, 2009). Under this guise, teachers must be active problem solvers and agents of change to include all children when they begin teaching in their own classrooms and schools.

At the same time, the daily praxis of teaching and being in schools affects teaching identity. As Young (2011) points out, “Once people become teachers in schools, the schools also have their own sets of norms and values; these are sometimes at odds with the norms and values of university programs” (p. 10). Individuals must discover and make sense of who they are themselves through their ever-evolving identities within schools. As Guadelli and Ousley (2009) observed student teachers are continuously sorting through their teacher-self through the lenses of their preparation and new experiences as they developed a pedagogical stance that best fit them. In effect, they were trying to find a workable sense of self that would comfortably mesh with how they viewed themselves and yet remain congruent within the realities of school. This sense of self arose through the various conflicts they encountered, the disjuncture of perceptions and realities. (p. 938)

This disjuncture between university and school praxis leads teachers to continuously negotiate and reconcile their teaching identities (Olsen, 2008). Teachers have to resolve who they are within schools and merge what they have come to believe within that environment. Nonetheless, when teachers’ identities are transformed after critically engaging in and internalizing an understanding of
the oppressive systems and structures within schools, they may actively find ways to resist and subvert the systems of public education to maintain a positive sense of themselves and their commitments as teachers.

Research demonstrates examples of teachers attempting to counter dominant systems of control within educational practices as finding ways to enact best practices (Broderick et al., 2011; Broderick, Reid, & Valle, 2008; Smyth, 2001). As Bushnell (2003) points out, individuals do this through developing alternative ways of viewing her or his school, or its situation within the larger world, and positioning her or his practice within their personal ideologies. These resistances often “reflect an effort to maintain a story to live by” (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 122), as teacher professional identity is tied acutely to “positive self-perception” (Moore & Hoffman, as cited by Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 119). Because teachers’ identities are tied deeply to teacher practice or “embodied” experience, it is “inherently messy and difficult” (Guadelli & Ousley, 2009, p. 932) and is “not something teachers have, but something they use in order to make sense of themselves as teachers” (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 123). The resistance work taken up by teachers is therefore often framed by the manners in which teachers resist dominant discourses to adhere to these professional identities.

Primarily, the disruptive work has two goals, to produce alternative frameworks of knowledge and meaning within their view of their schools and to experiment with new ways of living and new forms of relationships with their daily educational practices as teachers (Bushnell, 2003; Sachs, 2000; Watson, 2006). For teachers, small-scale resistance has many forms; it is dependent upon the sources available to teachers and the goals they would like to achieve (Beijaard et al., 2004). Resistance is, therefore, the power individuals can exercise within their school and community (Watson, 2006); for example, the curriculum they expose to students (Broderick et al., 2008; Montaño & Burstein, 2006), the advocacy they perform on behalf of students and families (Bushnell, 2003; Kasa-Hendrickson, 2005; Peters & Reid, 2009), and the manners wherein they speak out, against, and reframe discursive practices within schools and in their communities (Broderick et al., 2011; Musanti & Pence, 2010; Peters & Reid, 2009; Sachs, 2003). Although these types of resistances have their limitations, they cannot be ignored (Bushnell, 2003).

In general, this literature points to the ever-evolving identities of educators as they come to understand themselves and integrate knowledges from their education programs and work in schools. Although literature shows the theory to practice gap, this study aims to shine a light on the ongoing and complicated identity work that student teachers experience in coming to understand their place and opportunities to exert power in negotiating their developing professional identities. In the case of this study, student teachers were simultaneously coming to understand their graduate work and place in school when this study took place, further complicating their negotiations and use of tactics.

Methods

Context of the Study and Research Questions

This data originated from our work with graduate students enrolled in a one-year teacher preparation residency program in secondary inclusive special education. The program placed 18 masters students within two local urban schools for the course of one academic year, while they simultaneously participated in wrap-around coursework. Coursework centered on challenging dominant notions of schooling, including extensive preparation on inclusive pedagogy and disability studies. Coursework focused on fostering access for all students and helped student teachers learn how to use particular inclusive and differentiated pedagogical tools and practices within their clinically rich placements. At the core of the project was ongoing collaboration and constant communication between participants, their mentor teachers, and the university faculty responsible for the administration of the grant. Because the model was a collaborative effort and centered on the student teachers’ work in school sites and buildings, it was expected to lead to close working relationships in
which graduate students could bridge educational theory and practice, while enabling opportunities to develop and create innovation within the school sites in which they were placed (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Research in teacher preparation suggests that clinically rich programming, in which student teachers are provided with a substantial amount of time (at least 6 months of full-time work) within the field, better prepares candidates and produces better teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2009, 2010). It also suggests that clinically rich teacher education programming significantly affects teacher induction and has the potential to reduce attrition, as individuals feel better prepared and have had opportunities to pair university theory with teaching praxis (Darling-Hammond, 2009, 2010; Valencia et al., 2009; Zeichner, 2010). Further, because student teachers are often dispersed throughout various schools and districts, there is insufficient time to contextualize and problematize their teaching experiences with other student teachers and university faculty (Beck & Kosnick, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1999). To address this isolation and absence within this program, each student teacher was placed in a cohort with eight others (in each school site) and met weekly with university faculty and school site mentors to problematize and contextualize how to enact what they were learning within their university coursework in their placement sites.

This study grew out of particular “noticings” and dialogues at our weekly student teacher, mentor, and faculty meetings. At the beginning of the school year, there was a sense of frustration among the student teachers that manifested through our regular observations and collaboration with the system at the school. We became interested in the following research questions, “What aspects of inclusive pedagogy participants found both valuable and available within their placements?” And second, “how they navigated and practiced inclusive pedagogy within schools that were not wholly inclusive?” Overall, we were interested in understanding how participants internalized, and therefore resisted, the dominant discourses of their schools to practice what they were coming to see as part of their identities. Participants were selected utilizing purposeful sampling because of their participation within the grant and within the generalist secondary special education masters program (see Appendix A with more detailed information about participant background). At the outset of the study, participants had completed one special education and disability studies theory course and were concurrently enrolled in two inclusive teaching methods courses.

Data Collection

To further explore our “noticings,” we decided to undergo some preliminary fieldwork and collect more detailed participant observation field notes over the course of the first weeks of their placement—in classrooms where student teachers were placed and in team meetings and informal conversations between/with student teachers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To more fully explicate their negotiations and understandings of practicing inclusion, we conducted two focus groups centered on the students’ experiences within the placements and their understanding of their roles in relation to coursework. Both focus groups had nine participants, lasted between one hour and one hour and 15 minutes, and took place at one of the student teaching school sites (see Appendix B for guide). Through these discussions, it was obvious that students had begun to conceptualize “effective” education as “inclusive” education and (together) were beginning to figure out ways to manipulate the system to do what they stated was best for kids. After transcribing, checking for accuracy, and dissecting preliminary data from the focus groups, we conducted eight follow-up interviews with seven of the participants (one participant was interviewed twice) to further explore this phenomenon. Interviewing is a powerful tool because it is a flexible process that provides space to more fully conceptualize individuals’ experience with a phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Although interviewing may seem like the simple elicitation of memories and experiences, in keeping with the qualitative perspective that meaning occurs in context, the interviewer has an important and substantive role in the coconstruction of meaning and narration. This integration of individual interviews with selected participants provided a productive iterative process to supplement our focus groups, and this enriched not only our
understanding of the collective experience of participants, but also of the teacher candidates’ individual experiences in negotiating their emerging identities. Student teachers who participated within individual interviews were selected because of the depth of examples they provided within the first two focus groups. Participants who described and provided specific (and less general) answers to the relationship between inclusion, placement, and coursework were selected to further elaborate with researchers. Although clearly focused observation of the student teachers interviewed could have yielded additional insight into the specific ways that they utilized tactics to maneuver, we were especially interested in the ways they narrated and made sense of their experiences. As part of the focus of this project was maintaining and negotiating an inclusive identity, their descriptions of the ways they enacted those commitments was salient.

We utilized phenomenological semistructured interviewing with open-ended questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Trainor & Graue, 2013). Interviews attempted to unearth the particular methods that students were utilizing to “practice inclusion” within their school sites, as well as the logic behind these methods of inclusion and why students placed value on them. These interviews lasted between one hour and two hours. The interview data were transcribed by the researchers, checked for accuracy, and utilized to further develop interview questions. Questions were developed inductively from the researchers’ continued fieldwork at the site and the interviewees’ responses. For the purpose of this article, we focus on data collected during the focus groups and interviews because data collected during participant observation drove and informed the interviews and focus groups.

Analysis

Analysis of the data proceeded inductively (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and was conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the study (Brantlinger, Klingner, & Richardson, 2005). From the beginning of the study, analysis of data informed subsequent data collection. After completing data collection, transcripts were reanalyzed, coded, and recoded utilizing the online qualitative software, Dedoose (Manhattan Beach, CA, USA). Coding took on a multidimensional process that first identified the broad and overarching pedagogical practices that participants mentioned as central to their developing inclusive identities and then unearthed the particular “tactical” mechanisms they utilized to engage in these practices. For example, we found that participants positioned collaboration with general education teachers as significant to their own inclusive identities. As a result, participants took up specific tactics, like “making time” and “positioning themselves as learners/novices,” to embed inclusive practice within placements that did not afford them common planning time. The coding framework continued to evolve as we (as researchers) began to understand how participants made sense of and attempted to manifest inclusive pedagogy within their placements.

Codes and working definitions were iteratively evaluated against each data source by the researchers to ensure they captured participants’ understanding and meanings conveyed. Triangulation of the data, through observation, interview, and continued work within the school sites, helped to expose the complications and contradictions that erupted from our participants’ negotiations (Flick, 2008). We were able to compare the repetitions and relationships, as well as begin to make sense of the particular methods of inclusive pedagogy and practice on which the students placed value and took up within their practice as educators.

Findings

It was clear that most of the student teachers felt that the schools’ practices did not align completely (or at all) with what they were learning within their university coursework, specifically regarding their understanding of inclusive pedagogy and disability studies. For participants, inclusion was explained as commitment to an ideology they believed “best” supported their students. Further, this meant providing services in cotaught or consult classrooms where teachers provide individualized and differentiated support to students with and without identified disabilities. Inclusivity implied creating “an
environment where children with labels are not segregated based on their labels” (Alex), in which there is “an awareness for, not just inclusion, but just looking at children with disabilities differently … looking at them as being competent to do it in their way, whatever way works for them” (Lara).

Participants identified inclusive practices as the avenue for ensuring that all students were provided with optimal opportunities for success, or “what was best for kids.” But because these students were placed in schools that did not have systems, structures, and strategies that promoted fully inclusive practices, student teachers were often forced to reevaluate their understanding of, and manipulation of, their pedagogical grounding within inclusion, finding ways to implement particular practices of inclusion in various unsystematic, disorganized, and often spontaneous ways. The structural roadblocks forced attempts to “sneak in” inclusive practices that they were learning about within their coursework. Although these emerging teachers described to the researchers finding value in many aspects of inclusion, they only pursued particular practices within their placements. They utilized what de Certeau (1984) refers to as tactics, to at least partially fulfill their own commitments to inclusion.

As Julie stated:

Sometimes it feels like you are working against the system of the school, and the system of the school is working against you in terms of what you have to get done, and sometimes personally you have find ways to get around it professionally.

These methods of brokering everyday life, methods that de Certeau (1984) terms “tactics” allowed student teachers to assert aspects of inclusive pedagogy that they found valuable to their developing identities. Although these approaches were limited, haphazard, and located within the locus of their control, they were able to negotiate their developing professional identities as inclusive teachers. Participants did not adopt or try to implement all aspects of inclusive pedagogy. They integrated methods that were dependent on opportunities made and available within these school placements. In other words, student teachers often chose particular discourses and pedagogies of inclusion to enact, while disregarding others. For example, there was at least one self-contained classroom within each school site for students deemed to be significantly or severely disabled. However, for our student teachers there was no significant discussion or dialogue of using tactics to include these students. Nonetheless, for students who were placed within less restrictive placements, participants described ways to “get around” the structure of the school, thus becoming brokers between what they believed was essential for maintaining themselves as inclusive educators and the practices of the schools and the school system in which they were placed. Participants perceived that these tactical approaches were their only possible recourse to ensure that their students were “getting what they needed” (Sasha). Participants were situated to act within and between modes of creative opportunity that operated between the gaps and slips; their efforts to practice inclusive pedagogy were opportunistic, rather than strategic and structural. We found that participants engaged in more pronounced tactics in order to practice inclusive pedagogy centered on the themes of collaboration, communication and relationship building with other educators; seeing all students as learners, developing an authentic sense of belonging and maintaining high expectations; and viewing and reacting to behavior differently.

“If People Get Together, It’s Better”: Collaboration, Communication, and Relationship Building with Other Educators

Personally I think my own experiences, like being in the classroom and watching the content teacher fly through this lesson, it makes me want to be like, “You have to slow down, you should be doing this or doing that.” I don’t know but it makes me value the idea of inclusion a little more. (Sasha)

Sasha asserted that she could be an added value within the planning and believes that through opportunities of collaboration and coplanning, she could aid in the students’ success within the classroom. A commitment to collaboration between special education and general education teachers is a central idea of successful inclusion (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger,
To Sasha and many of the participants, this collaboration between educators demonstrated a shared responsibility and commitment to teach all students, in which educators design, implement, and evaluate students’ educational programs and their individual education plans (IEPs) to fit the needs of the students within their classrooms. Dedication to inclusion is often exhibited by school systems through providing common planning time for the general educators, special educators, and related services providers to collaborate for instruction through formalized processes (Theoharis, 2009). Teachers who participated in coteaching models identified coplanning time as essential (Scruggs, Mastropiero, & McDuffie, 2007). Our participants were generally not afforded this planning time. Although many studies focus on the issues associated with coplanning and coteaching (Cook & Friend, 2010; Graziano & Navarrette, 2012), it was perceived as an essential, yet often absent, component of inclusion for the student teachers who participated in the study.

Given the lack of common planning time, participants resorted to an often “clever utilization of time” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 39), by finding opportunities to collaborate that presented themselves on a day-to-day basis. Ally discussed this struggle within a 9th grade Global History and Geography class, where she was assigned as consult teacher, but had no common planning time. She described her responsibility to “those kids” (the students within the class) and the dilemma of working to provide support to her students without having an opportunity to design or implement the lesson, which left her without a structure or system to purposefully support the students in more meaningful ways. She outlined the following tactic of making time to collaborate:

> What I do at the end of the day is I go to probably three of the teachers and see if I can talk to them about what is coming up, what I need to do, if I need to know anything … even if it’s fifteen minutes at the end of the day.

Ally worked diligently to make time to communicate the needs of the students to the general education teacher, she described, “sometimes you have to push and push and push … so many times you are advocating, trying to get your students what they need, so they can learn to the best of their ability.” Although her mentors and coteachers described her as tireless, this daily effort to communicate with her teachers was the only method she could find to collaborate.

Similarly, Sasha described the process she utilized to find time to help her students within her consult and cotaught classes as:

> approaching the content teacher and pushing your way in there. Kind of like chasing them down … I think this is a really good idea for this particular student if you want them to learn anything in your class, instead of just falling asleep, so let’s just like make this work. Pushing and pushing and pushing every day until they give you those lesson plans or they find that five or ten minutes when they can talk to you really quick.

Participants found ways to “make time” with the teachers they were working with, most often by being open and available at any time their coteachers were. The tactical nature of these everyday negotiations of collaboration was evidenced by the small ways each found to meet with teachers and service providers to ensure their students had the support, modifications, and differentiation implicit within inclusive practices around instruction and assessment. Sasha described:

> I asked the content teacher “When do you have free time to lesson plan because my science background is a little rusty and I’m excited to be in here, but have no idea … how to help these kids when they have science specific question[s].” … I asked her about that and all the periods that she had free. We had none but we both get here early, around 7:25, 7:30. That’s the time that I have to try and plan with her and things are always changing … I was pretty happy last week; she gave me a bunch of sheets and I sat in the teachers’ lounge thinking, “We can do this with this one and we can do this.”

Sasha’s apparent flexibility and openness afforded her the time she needed with this educator. Additionally, by positioning herself as a learner, she was afforded opportunities to forge relationships in which teachers were willing to find time to work with her. Sasha’s desire for her supports and modifications to be heard and understood as meaningful was also important. Sasha pushed and pushed and pushed like Ally, but she was not perceived as aggressive as Ally. Nonetheless, both
engaged in the persistent tactics of making time and positioning themselves as learners to ensure collaboration. Cara utilized similar tactics to position herself and ensure collaboration.

Participants had to work to foster relationships and develop rapport to obtain and maintain access to co-teachers, in order for them to “allocate time” to collaborate with them. Cara discussed the ways she navigated working as a consult teacher:

In the CT classrooms it’s really important to get to know your coteacher. Because a lot of them are really nervous to have us in there . . . I don’t have allocated time to coplan but I made it a point to. I just said “Can I just come and sit with you while you plan and ask you questions?” She’s like, “Yeah, that’d be really cool.”

Cara found the only way to be given time with her coteacher was to “get to know her.” In an earlier part of her interview, she discussed relationship building as a main tactic she utilized for teachers to be willing to collaborate. Cara described that her interactions were not occurring naturally; she had to prompt these discussions and find times that worked for the general education teacher. Even more, she had to position herself as a novice, seeking guidance from an expert teacher. She was careful to position herself as a recipient of knowledge, a learner, through careful open-ended questioning and subtle prompting, and through what she called “playing dumb,” she was able to infuse inclusive techniques into the classrooms. Cara’s positioning of herself as the learner played within the dynamics typically associated with student teaching, in which the practicing teacher holds a privileged status (Poirier, 1992). To be afforded a say within the classroom, she needed to acknowledge the teacher’s expert status. Cara consistently reminded the others in her cohort to let the general education teachers take credit for lesson and activity strategies she had prompted. Cara felt that this worked well; it was her way of not stepping on anyone’s toes and it supported the larger goals on increasing student access and engagement.

Positive understandings of the influence of collaboration prompted participants to attempt to enact inclusive tactics to service their students. Very often, this was accomplished by “any means necessary,” including making time outside of the school day and going out of their way to develop relationships with teachers.

“I See Behavior as Communicating Something to Me”: Viewing and Reacting to Behavior Differently

A professor, she told the whole class to write down the worst behaviors of the worst children. Then it was self-actualizing and she asked, “Have you ever done any of these?” Yes, my hand was in the air the whole class. Which is why I said, “I don’t believe in bad behavior anymore.” Sometimes people act out. Sometimes people cry. Sometimes you want to throw something . . . I see behavior as communicating something to me. That experience changed the way I perceived my students. (Alex)

That activity prompted a powerful realization of the deeper roots of students’ behavior to Alex, the participant above. The knowledge that “behavior is both purposeful and motivated” (Regan, 2009, p. 61), but not something students do to teachers, affected how he thought about and reacted to behavior with his students. By trying to understand behavior, Alex began to internalize and regard the student actions as communication, helping him to begin to question and understand the students’ underlying motives and needs (Lovett, 1996). This preliminary realization and understanding of behavior as communication provided participants a space and mindset to enact tactics to prevent challenging behavior from occurring in the first place and begin to question behavior that is typically construed as “bad.” The teacher candidates were finding ways to resist discourses that positioned some students as “bad,” “noncompliant,” or “aggressive,” either as a function of their own personality or due to poverty, race, or parental noninvolvement. In other words, these dominant discourses locate behavior as intrinsic to the individual student, rather than a function of the school or classroom context. Conversely, these teacher candidates drew on coursework and discourses of behavior as contextual, relational and communicative. Lara compares her understanding of behavior to that of her coteacher:
I see the nonrelationship that she [the teacher] has with this one particular kid. She automatically assumes that he can’t do the work. I see that he feels like he’s being picked on all the time, being sent for time-outs or school suspensions. He calls out a lot, you know. She would ignore and then he would get aggravated, and then he would say something foul that will cause him to act out. . . Maybe if she incorporates him more into the lesson, into the class, includes him—that could probably alleviate a lot of the behavioral problems. . . He wants the attention. He wants to be heard.

Lara recognized that the student “wants to be heard.” She believed that he was not acting out to be malicious, but that he wanted and needed the attention; he was communicating an unmet need. She explained that the student was often kicked out of class because of his disruptive behavior. To ensure that he remained in class, she wanted to provide support to meet his needs. Utilizing an inclusionary tactic of intentional engagement, Lara recognized an alternative method of supporting his unmet need by incorporating him as part of the lesson:

Because I had him in my station (during a small group activity) and I said, “If he is not on the board, the entire group is going to just derail everything that I’m trying to do.” So because I’m not too good with the Smart Board, I had him operate it and I had him involved . . . so he was engaged . . . and then, of course, I included him within the lesson’s content. I was like, “Okay, so, what do you think? What’s the answer to this?”

Lara further explained that the student was engaged throughout the whole lesson (which was atypical for this student) and that he did not “behave badly” when she ensured he was situated as an asset to the lesson. By thinking about and positioning his behavior, not as something innate to him, but operating within the context of his desire for attention and engagement, Lara provided the student the individualized support he needed to be successful. Lara’s goal of keeping the student within the classroom came to fruition through her ability to perceive his behavior as communication, allowing her to utilize meaningful participation tactics within her own lessons and in the classroom to keep him included.

Knowing and developing relationships with students ensured open dialogue regarding the support they needed. Resisting the discourse of noncompliance and opposition, Sasha described her utilization of dialogue with a student who struggled with impromptu tests and quizzes. When she realized (through discussion with the student) that his behavior was the result of frustration over unplanned evaluations, she apologized and said:

“Okay I’m really sorry [that] we kind of sprung this on you. Next time I’ll make sure that you know there is any test coming.” and ever since he’s been really calm. Then he missed a couple days of school, and Joe (another teacher) was trying to get him caught up. The next day he comes in . . . I was absent this day and Joe was like, “Oh you have this test.” He (the student) lost it, he’s said, “No one told me I’m going to have a test, no one talked about . . . you didn’t say anything about this yesterday.” He lost control and had to be kicked out that day. I told Joe, “Oh no the day that I wasn’t there he has to be kicked out. What are you doing?” Knowing things like that, that this kid needs to know that there is an assessment coming up, really helps.

By being open to dialogue with the student, in which she began to understand why the student was upset, she quickly adapted her practice to suit his individual needs, therefore keeping him included within class. Sasha’s willingness to communicate and adapt her own behavior enabled the student to have his needs met and be successfully included within the class. Sasha’s humility and openness to understanding behavior as an aspect of communication helped her connect to her students to ensure students’ needs were respected and met.

Participants’ positioning of and willingness to get to know and better understand the needs of their students enabled them to develop strong and meaningful relationships. Student teachers placed value on knowing and understanding students’ needs, wants, and desires, and through these relationships, were better able to deter behavior that may be construed as bad. This tactic of dialogue also shifts the power dynamic to one that is more reciprocal than didactic. Moreover, student teachers went out of their way to connect with students who were often perceived as difficult by other adults. According to Cara:
I know at the end of the day kids whose IEPs say “cannot connect to adults,” or “[have] trouble connecting to authority figures.” When those kids chase you down in the hallway because you had an appointment or to do something else during the class period, and say, “Where were you today, I missed you.” That is what makes every hard day and every difficult teacher worth it, because that kid, whose IEP flat out says they will not connect to adults, obviously you were wrong on that, so let’s see what else you are wrong about.

By understanding behavior as a method of communication, these educators “resist[ed] the frequent pressure and temptation to send children with behavior problems to separate classes or schools” (Peterson & Hittie, 2003, p. 48). By looking closer at the relationship between the behavior and the instructional context, including teaching style, curricular choices, and issues outside of school, participants were provided with an opportunity to “work with” and not “do to” students to manage behavior (Kohn, 2006). Students and teachers were provided with opportunities to reflect on their own practices and behaviors. Tactics included engaging within open dialogue, intentional engagement, and acknowledging students’ frustrations, and each provided participants opportunities to recognize their students as learners with specific needs, furthering their ability to include kids and maintain their own developing identities as inclusive educators.

“Because I Didn’t Call Him Out, I Didn’t Make Him Uncomfortable”: Constructing All Students as Learners

I see a lot of blatant segregation within the room and segregation within the grade level … all the students who are labeled are within one of the classes. That’s not inclusion. Within that class, when you zoom in they are also segregated in the groups. Like when you came in today you saw the students in certain groups and when the mentor teacher started announcing the groups, I knew what they were going to be, I could see what she was doing. If I can see it, I’m pretty sure that the kids can see it. (Valerie)

As Valerie pointed out, homogenous grouping that was based upon students’ disability label (or racial background) was a common practice within her school site. This process of traveling as a cohort, having a class labeled as the inclusion class, or consistently creating homogenous groups (either pull-out or within-class) based exclusively on disability status, was a practice that participants saw as exclusionary and not consistent with their developing identities as inclusive educators. Although class schedules were already set as the cohort, having a class labeled as the inclusion class, or consistently creating homogenous groups (either pull-out or within-class) based exclusively on disability status, was a practice that participants saw as exclusionary and not consistent with their developing identities as inclusive educators. This process of traveling as a cohort, having a class labeled as the inclusion class, or consistently creating homogenous groups (either pull-out or within-class) based exclusively on disability status, was a practice that participants saw as exclusionary and not consistent with their developing identities as inclusive educators. Although class schedules were already set as the cohort, having a class labeled as the inclusion class, or consistently creating homogenous groups (either pull-out or within-class) based exclusively on disability status, was a practice that participants saw as exclusionary and not consistent with their developing identities as inclusive educators.

Lara’s tactics included finding ways to make sure that her students were comfortable and not singled out because of their need for help within the classroom. Lara explained her tactic of brokering while preserving a student’s dignity when working with Rhadzeer, a student with a learning disability who was averse to receiving supports in the classroom:

I went back to class the next day and he was just sitting there again. It was one of those situations where they were doing Cornell notes. I know Rhadzeer definitely felt out of place. He didn’t know what to do, so he was just disruptive [in that class]. On that particular day, he was just sitting there. There was somebody sitting next to him, Corey, who does not have an IEP but he’s also needs help. I asked, “Corey, let me help you. I can write this for you?” He said, “Oh, Ms. S, you would? You’ll take my notes?” I was like, “Sure,” hoping that Rhadzeer would hear me, because I don’t want to call him out. Right away he said, “Ms. S, can you take my notes for me too?” Because I didn’t call him out. I didn’t make him feel uncomfortable. I didn’t just go and take his paper and say, “Let me write this for you.” He realized that one of his peers was willing to receive the help, so that made him comfortable enough to ask.

Lara made sure that Rhadzeer was comfortable and able to ask for help on his terms, where he would not be singled out. The dignity that Lara afforded Rhadzeer and the help she was willing to provide to students without disabilities like Corey created an atmosphere where students could ask for help and not feel as though they were singled out.

Similarly, Sasha was asked by the content teacher to work with an individual student while the rest of the students worked in groups, reinforcing a dominant discourse of homogeneity and
isolation of difference. Sasha decided to subvert the teacher’s request and have the student work within one of the small groups and utilize peer support. She felt that isolating the student “just excludes the student even more.” Instead of hovering over her students, she wanted to preserve students’ dignity and promote active engagement with the content. By utilizing peer supports in that moment, Sasha ensured engagement within the lesson, in which support was reciprocal, enabling peers to utilize and provide support. All students were empowered to see themselves as active agents in their learning and were not made to feel pointed out as needing help and assistance, or as Sasha asserted, “babysat.”

Sasha described further methods she used to ensure students were provided with the adaptations needed to be successful within English class. She noticed that two students who had IEPs were having difficulty organizing notes and decided to create a graphic organizer.

After handing it out, I started noticing that the other students began to use it. It was really useful and helpful in there for all of the students. If you flipped over the worksheet there were spaces that you could take notes for that class and had the page numbers to remind the students where to look back… Little things that, I try to do all the time.

Although Sasha felt that a specific student needed this adaptation to gain meaningful access to the curriculum, she did not single him out in front of the class; she provided all of the students an adaptation that supported a class need and her own commitments. Through this “little thing,” this tactic of universal availability of support, even when the lesson has not been universally designed by the teacher, she ensured him the opportunity to gain the required concepts and found that it helped everyone within the class; the teacher even applauded her simple innovation.

Lara described the methods she used to ensure students who needed pull-out and testing accommodation services were not overtly identified. Instead of pulling out only students who have IEP’s, Lara offered all students an opportunity for a separate testing location. Through her open invitation, Lara made sure that it was not a marginalized space with associated stigma She often joked that when doing pull-out support, she would never just take kids identified with disabilities. She stated, “I mix it up, so my students never know.” This again reflects the tactic of universal availability of support, which decenters the idea of “normalcy” in the classroom space.

Another method for assuring students’ sense of belonging was maintaining and communicating high expectations for all students in the face of dominant discourses of pervasive low expectations for particular students. Valerie describes:

I’m working with a student right now in the AIS period, and the teacher asks if she should also be getting the modified essay sheet, where she would just fill in the blanks. I was like, “o, she is actually really great.”

And the teacher seemed really surprised because she has an IEP, and she has trouble with comprehension. The mentor teacher’s assumption that because the child had a disability she would be unable to complete the task challenged Valerie’s commitment to maintaining high expectations for all students. By presuming competence (Biklen & Burke, 2006; Kliwer, Biklen, & Kasa-Hendrickson, 2006) and communicating that belief, Valerie guaranteed that the student would have the opportunity to complete the assignment to the best of her ability, without unnecessary modifications, where she would “just fill in the blanks.” This subtle tactical shift in language reflects a deep commitment to high expectations and ensuring authentic belonging for all students that was vital to our participants’ developing identities as inclusive educators. These shared understandings of their purpose as educators supported a commitment to ensuring dignity and respect within their classrooms and their roles as educators. Although these comments and reframings did not result in changes to students’ schedules or altered teaching roles in cotaught classes, the hope is that these tactical shifts start ripples that could lead to larger, more strategic alterations in practice.
Discussion

“I ignore the fact that I know something is wrong, and that I have no control over it” (Alex). Like Alex, each participant cited various teaching practices that she or he considered ineffective, or noninclusive, including segregation, pull-out programming, traditional didactic teaching styles, punitive ways of responding to students, and ineffective opportunities for collaboration and communication. Nonetheless, even with these identified barriers to practicing inclusion, participants attempted to bridge many of the concepts and ideas they were learning within their coursework to their sites, often affixing covert methods to enact what they considered best for students, even when the paid staff in the building were seemingly not utilizing these practices. Participants chose to engage in specific tactics to enact aspects of inclusive pedagogy that they found meaningful and part of their developing educator identities.

Although participants’ utilization of tactics to ensure specific inclusive pedagogy manifested within their placements, the student teachers’ subversion of the discursive systems and structures available was limited and based on how they took up and practiced inclusion. Their limited power within these structures necessitated enacting specific inclusive pedagogy within the gaps and slips as tactics. These isolated actions were the only recourse available for student teachers who were resistant to the dominant school discourses. Utilization of tactics was within their locus of control, in which they were “personally creating meaning . . . that contribute[d] to their sense of professional identities and guide[d] their actions” (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p. 719). Their identities, and therefore their practices as teachers, were being structured by their belief in inclusion. These acts of resistance provided student teachers an opportunity to begin to make sense and maintain a semblance of their selves within school, but this was not without complication.

Because participants had to simultaneously negotiate the dominant discourses of the university in which they were enrolled, with their public school placements, they were continually sorting out what mattered to their identities. Participants had to identify what was realistic and possible within their schooling contexts, in regard to what they were learning at the university and within their placements. Although we have focused specifically on their commitments to inclusive education in this article, that it not to say that other facets of their teacher identities were not brought to the forefront in ways that affirmed and challenged the dominant discourses of their school placement sites. We had numerous discussions regarding their perspectives on culturally responsive pedagogies and discourses of race and class. Clearly those intersect and inform their understanding of education for students with disabilities, many of whom occupy other marginalized positions within the school. Further, participants could have been compelled to perform their inclusive identities in response to perceived expectations by the researchers, who were also part of the graduate program (Bettie, 2014). Both authors espoused and continually enacted commitments to inclusive pedagogy and held a purview of power over our student teachers by the very nature of our teacher–student relationships. In short, our participants might have felt compelled to tell us what they believed that we wanted to hear. Nevertheless, many of our observations and discussions with mentor teachers confirmed what participants stated within focus groups and interviews.

It is important to keep in mind that the dominant discourses of the school were not static, uniform, or explicitly stated. There was no stated commitment to segregated or pull-out education that the students were struggling against. Rather, these discourses operated far more subtly, with the consequence of creating a climate where special education teachers felt marginalized alongside their students with disabilities. The dominant discourses of pervasive low expectations, deficit-based frameworks, and homogeneity and isolation limited the teacher candidates’ opportunities to position themselves in more emancipatory ways and forced them to rely on less strategic maneuvers to exert change.

Similarly, many of the mentor teachers they worked with were also attempting to tactically resist these dominant, limiting discourses, working to enact belief systems not entirely valued by the larger school community. The majority of our mentor teachers shared the same deep commitments to inclusion and were constantly working to shift the culture and practices of their building, with
varying degrees of success. Further, student teachers, mentors, and university faculty engaged in weekly group discussions to further support participants’ practice of inclusive practices and bridge what they were learning from the university with what was accepted within their school placements.

Although the students utilized tactics to maintain their identities as inclusive educators, the teacher candidates did not make systemic changes within the schools. One of the stated purposes of the grant-funded program was to develop more inclusive practices within the school sites through purposeful professional development, integration of student teachers as additional resources, and fostering relationships with mentor teachers and faculty personnel. Although these students were able to utilize tactics to effect small, in-class changes for particular students, the institution was not transformed by the insertion of the student teachers into the school site. For example, no segregated classrooms were eliminated, no students were permanently removed from the functional skills classrooms into general education content classes, and students exhibiting disruptive behavior were still regularly removed from many classrooms. According to de Certeau (1984), tactics are situated within:

isolated actions … taking advantage of “opportunities” and depending on them, being without any bases where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This “nowhere” gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chances offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. (p. 37)

Tactics, in and of themselves, are not transformative. Tactics work within the constraints of the institution. In this way, a tactic provides space for individuals who are constrained by a system, to find ways enact their belief systems while remaining within it (de Certeau, 1984). Although participants were able to maintain what they thought was important to their identities as inclusive educators and sought out opportunities to practice inclusive strategies, they were nonetheless unsuccessful in attempts to make any real or lasting change within schooling institutions.

However, by operating within this space between the institution of the university and the school, individuals were afforded opportunities to situate the use of tactics and hone their skills as teachers (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Guadelli & Ousley, 2009; Schepens, Aelterman, & Vlerick, 2009). The position of student teacher provided participants with the opportunity to employ tactics to develop their emerging identities and commitments to inclusion. Although schools were not altered, the meaning they conferred to their role as teachers and their goal of acting as effective, inclusive educators aided student teachers in bridging university theory with their own practice.

By providing the participants with rigorous academic coursework grounded in inclusive pedagogy and disability studies, situating participants within a cohort, and with multiple models of teaching, these participants were able to learn how and be supported to utilize the particular inclusive tools and practices they employed. Although not seamless, these clinically rich experiences provided them with opportunities to learn to operate within school systems that were not wholly inclusive while applying an inclusive identity. The residency (and specific aspects of the program) provided participants a chance to “adapt their practice in a well-grounded fashion,” with ample opportunities to “innovate and improvise to meet the specific classroom contexts” they encountered (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Moreover, though the majority of mentor teachers were supportive of and helped student teachers bridge theory to praxis, their experiences with multiple mentors and teaching philosophies provided student teachers an opportunity to learn to negotiate their identities in a meaningful way.

Finally, their interdependence helped students maintain their inclusive identities. These student teachers, supported by 17 other individuals learning the same inclusive practices and working within the same school system, were able to decontextualize their experiences and maintain their identities as inclusive educators (Beck & Kosnick, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2009). The cohort model reinforced participants’ understanding of inclusion as effective secondary special education teaching, as they had at least eight other individuals within their buildings and 17 other individuals within their coursework and in their seminar with whom to discuss ideas, strategize how to utilize tactics within the classroom, and
adapt their practices based on what worked with specific teachers and students with whom they were working. Their goal was only imagined through the employment of such practices.

Although participants felt constrained, student teachers were able to maintain their developing identities as inclusive educators because they were not the sole individuals working toward practicing inclusion and had the support of each other. Forced to act as brokers between ideal and everyday practice, these subtle forms of resistance helped them negotiate disjunctures within highly contested school sites to develop their identities as inclusive educators.

Positioning practice counter to dominant systems of control and manipulating them toward your pedagogical location and belief systems can be challenging. For teachers, advocating for students and promoting change “requires taking tremendous risks, including the charge of being ‘out-of-compliance’ with school regulations and decisions” (Levin as cited by Peters & Reid, p. 558). As teacher educators, we need to prepare our students to work within the system we have. We cannot just expose them to inclusive pedagogy that is best practice, but we have to show them how to use this praxis within systems that are often not set up to support inclusion. We need to start by understanding the contexts in which our students work. We also need to provide multiple models of teaching to ensure that students are provided with varied approaches and have many ideas and understandings of what teaching is. That is to say that they need to work with lots of individuals—so they can find their own voice—instead of simply taking on their host teacher’s. We often hear that students leave universities thinking one way and then enter schools where those ideals are challenged and their identities are fractured. We need to build networks of support that help students practice inclusive pedagogy, both in student teaching and after they enter the field. When teachers have a supportive network and are able to see themselves as agents of change who are engaged in inclusive strategies, “however small or transient or temporary those efforts may appear to be, to us or to others” (Broderick et al., 2011, p. 834), they are better able to retain their identities as critically conscious educators and translate those identities to their practice as teachers.

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Notes on contributors
Carrie E. Rood, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Social Foundations and Advocacy Department at SUNY Cortland. She received her PhD from Syracuse University in 2015. Her dissertation and recent publications have investigated the impact of inclusive and disability studies focused teacher preparation programs on teacher identity development and maintenance. Recent publications have appeared in Teachers College Record and Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Handicaps.

Christine Ashby, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Teaching and Leadership Department at Syracuse University, where she also coordinates the 1-6 and 7-12 Inclusive Education Masters’ Programs and serves as the Director of the Institute on Communication and Inclusion. Her teaching and research focus on inclusive education broadly, with specific emphasis on supports for students with labels of autism and other developmental disabilities, disability studies, and clinically rich teacher preparation. Her recent coedited book (with Megan Cosier) Enacting change from within: Disability studies meets teaching and teacher education (Peter Lang Publishers) illustrates the ways that disability studies in education can inform the practical work of teaching. Other recent publications have appeared in International Journal of Inclusive Education and Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Handicaps.

References


Appendix A

Participant Chart

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Previous Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Current Certifications</th>
<th>Undergraduate Degree</th>
<th>Race/Class/Disability</th>
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Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Guide

1. Prior to coming to this institution for your graduate degree in inclusive special education, what were your experiences with special education?
2. How have those experiences shaped your understanding of your role as a teacher?
3. How have your experiences during your coursework at this institution heightened and/or altered your understanding of your role as a teacher?
4. How have your experiences within the school site impacted your understanding of your role as a teacher?
5. In what ways do you see your experiences and understanding of your role aligning or misaligning?
6. Anything else you would like to add in regards to your continuing understanding of your role as a teacher?
7. If/when inclusion is brought up. Experiences with inclusion (as a student? Within prior teaching roles?) How do you experience and understand special education and inclusion?