

Higher Order Inclusion: Promoting Inclusion in Second Language Teacher Education

Carolyn Blume¹ & Sophie Engelen²

This symposium on inclusion widened the scope of attention from the issues facing diverse foreign language learners to consider the needs of diverse future language educators. Beginning with rationales for addressing foreign language teacher diversity from ethical and pragmatic perspectives, we as the conveners subsequently summarized existing research on diversity in higher education. Conceptualizing the remaining time as a collaborative examination of an underexplored issue, we then sought to initiate a conversation about the inclusive needs of pre-service language teachers and to lay out an agenda for the future.

Starting with the premise that inclusive language education can only be fostered when teachers reflect the diversity of the learners, including differences resulting from learning disabilities, physical handicaps, and neurodiversity, we briefly identified contemporary conditions that could foster greater heterogeneity among the teaching population. Changing legal and societal norms regarding disability have enabled increasing numbers of learners with so-called special educational needs to realize their academic potential and earn college-preparatory degrees. These students are slowly finding their way into college classrooms, including those that prepare future teachers of foreign languages.

However, research regarding inclusivity in higher education is limited; in the area of foreign language teacher education, it is virtually nonexistent. Recent findings indicate that staff are often theoretically receptive to inclusive education, but do not necessarily feel prepared to appropriately respond to diverse needs (Black et al., 2014). A survey of Spanish universities shows generational discrepancies, with younger staff feeling comparatively better informed and prepared than their elder colleagues (Álvarez-Pérez & López-Aguilar, 2015). While not associated with differences in experience, Blume and Marci-Boehncke (in review) furthermore found some indications that educators' receptivity towards diversity correlates with attitudes towards digital tools, which can foster accessibility for disabled students (Wilkins et al., 2021). These disparate attitudes and estimations of competence reflect the gap Collins et al. (2019) identify between accommodations for individual students and systemic change towards inclusive higher education. This is especially the case as regards applied areas of study, such as teacher preparation.

In light of this background, we adopted an inductive approach to construct knowledge in the context of the symposium. Participants collaborated to analyze one of several case studies of upper-secondary and university-level students' experiences. These brief narratives by

¹ Technical University of Dortmund, Germany, carolyn.blume@tu-dortmund.de

² Justus-Liebig-University Gießen, Germany, sophie.i.engelen@rom.jlug.de

disabled pre-service teachers in their own words offered varying perspectives from multiple universities and in relation to English, French, and Spanish. Participants in the symposium, comprised of teacher educators, classroom teachers, early career and established researchers, and representatives of language centers, analyzed the case studies to identify relevant issues from various international and interdisciplinary perspectives. These included pragmatic issues regarding, for example, the accessibility of materials or assessments, and more philosophical challenges associated with tensions inherent in pre-professional university education structures, models of disability, and differentiation.

Drawing on their own personal and professional experiences, the participants shared insights into inclusive practices in various settings, identified the challenges associated with so-called special needs for pre-service teachers, and added perspectives regarding necessary accommodations for disabled university researchers and educators. The participants highlighted the tensions related to meeting the needs of individual learners with unique strengths in environments with high degrees of standardization and ableist norms. These conflicts contribute to insecurity among teacher educators, who are further required to bridge the institutional gap between academic inquiry and professional preparation. One example includes a pre-service teacher who compensates for her challenges with orthography due to combined reading and spelling disorder (RSD) with assistive technologies. Another case pertains to the prospective hearing-impaired educator who relies on speech-to-text applications for oral activities. These disabilities and their accommodation raise questions about the role of teacher educators and of foreign language instruction and global communication more broadly. Such issues figure in communication with disabled students about their needs, which must strive to balance information-seeking to find appropriate solutions that abide by legal constraints and institutional norms, and students' right to privacy (cf. Engelen, El Sherbiny Ismail & Gerstenberg, in review). These conversations require professional resources related to advising students, as well as physical resources, such as inclusive spaces or technologies.

The symposium served to introduce an aspect of foreign language teacher education that has heretofore been absent. The hope is that, by bringing attention to the stories of pre-service teachers in university training, individual and structural conversations about their needs, can be furthered. Pragmatic interests in recruiting exceptional educators for foreign languages needs to be a priority in light of looming teacher shortages, increasing academization in general, and initiatives to promote multilingualism across Europe. Excluding potential future teachers from the pool of talented candidates on the basis of disability is both ethically reprehensible and practically counterproductive.

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