Racial and Dis/Ability Equity-Oriented Educational Leadership Preparation

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we discuss the connection between the lack of special education specific preparation for leaders and decades of evidence of racial inequities in special education. In doing so, we have a four-fold purpose. First, we outline the basic Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) legal requirements that educational leadership preparation programs should provide prospective leaders. Second, we argue that educational leaders must develop a nuanced lens when engaging with the IDEA, informed by critical special and dis/Ability studies. Third, we provide a situated critique rooted in current IDEA racial equity monitoring to show how technical mandates are insufficient for assuring justice and equity on the ground level. And fourth, we propose three key components that should be added to special education leadership preparation programs in order to better prepare future administrators to achieve the goals of IDEA and reduce racial and dis/Ability disparities. We conclude it is imperative for future leaders to be equipped with the necessary IDEA legal literacy and critical dispositions so that educational equity and justice are possible for Black, Indigenous, Youth of Color (BIYOC) with and without dis/Abilities in schools.

KEYWORDS

Administrators, dis/Ability, leadership preparation, special education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) significantly shapes how educators provide special education services to the nearly 7 million students served under the legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). IDEA also shapes how special education leaders, at both district and school levels, understand their work, develop their workflow, interact with families and caregivers, and provide services to students with dis/Abilities[1], among other factors (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Due to the significant impact of IDEA on practice, educational leadership preparation programs must assure that prospective administrators have the skills, knowledge, and critical dispositions to meet the requirements of IDEA and effectively support special education programs in their schools and districts.

However, educational leaders often enter the field unprepared to assume their responsibilities regarding effective implementation of the IDEA. Educational leadership preparation programs do not provide prospective administrators with sufficient knowledge and field experiences in special education (Sun & Xin, 2019). Current administrators report a lack of preparedness to meet their duties for administering special education programs (NASSP, 2021), reporting "no special education training in their prin-

1 We purposely write, dis-slash (/)-Ability or Abilities, to denote our interdisciplinary and intersectional Disability Studies in Education (DSE) paradigm, that focuses on the social, emotional, cultural, material and political constructions of both disability and ability in educational contexts. The capitalization of A is a reclaiming (Linton, 1998) of historically multiply marginalized youths such as Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color's (BIYOC) mis-labeling and treatment in special education. It also signifies a reclaiming of our Abilities outside the paradigm of special education identification, labeling and treatment systems that have caused psychological and social trauma and oppression for BIYOC students in education (Iqtadar et al., 2020; Katrell & Hernández-Saca, in press).

cipal preparation programs" (Christensen et al., 2013, p. 104), and others exiting their preparation programs "unprepared or only somewhat prepared" (Schaaf et al., 2015, p. 178) to provide oversight to special education programs. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for the administration of special education programs have been a long-neglected area within university-based administrator preparation programs. In addition, failure to adequately prepare educational leaders during preservice contributes to non-compliance with the IDEA and costly litigation consequences for school districts (e.g., Pazey & Cole, 2013; Zirkel & Machin, 2012).

Moreover, the administrator's lack of preparation in supporting special education programs in their schools and districts contributes to educational inequities (Voulgarides, 2018), especially those related to the intersection of race and dis/Ability which have plagued the educational system since the 1960s (see Dunn, 1968). While the IDEA includes provisions to address racial disproportionality in special education, inequities persist and remain a significant civil rights concern (Artiles, 2019; Skiba et al., 2008). Racial and dis/Ability inequity in special education outcomes includes the misdiagnosis and over-representation of Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color (BIYOC) in special education and the overuse of suspensions for BIYOC with dis/Abilities in schools (e.g., Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Inequities are more likely to occur around high-incidence and more subjective categories of special education classifications such as specific learning dis/Abilities, emotional behavioral disorders, intellectual dis/Abilities, speech and language impairments, and autism (Blanchett, 2006).

The inequities are the result of a confluence of factors related to, but not limited to: (a) punitive discipline policies and practices; (b) inadequate interventions and referrals; (c) inadequate instruction and assessment; (d) differential access to educational opportunities; (e) weak family and community partnerships with schools; (f) misguided teacher expectations and misconceptions; (g) cultural dissonance, biases and institutional racism and ableism due to white and ability supremacy and; (h) changing district sociodemographic contexts (Iqtadar et al., 2020; Marsico, 2022; Skiba, et al., 2008; Voulgarides et al., 2013). The sources, causes, and magnitude of the disparities are extremely complex (Ahram et al, 2021; Artiles, 2019; Shifrer & Fish, 2020), and future educational leaders must be prepared to address these systemic racist and ableist challenges through a justice and equity-oriented educational policy lens.

PURPOSE AND PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Given the lack of special education specific preparation for leaders and decades of evidence of racial and dis/Abilities inequities, we have a fourfold purpose. One, we outline the basic IDEA legal requirements that educational leadership preparation programs should provide prospective leaders in order to ground our argument. Two, we argue that educational leaders must develop a nuanced lens when engaging with the IDEA, informed by critical special and dis/Ability studies. Three, we provide a situated critique rooted in current IDEA racial equity monitoring to show how technical mandates are insufficient for assuring justice and equity on the ground level. Four, we propose three key components to be "explicated [and] integrated into the curricular design of leadership preparation programs" (Zaretsky et al., 2008, p. 173) to better prepare future administrators to achieve the goals of IDEA and reduce racial and dis/Ability disparities. The key components consist of racial and dis/Ability equity-oriented educational leadership strategies, focused critical special education content, and expanded professional advocacy and policy development.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND IDEA LITERACY

In this section we provide a brief overview of the IDEA related duties that leaders must attend to while in the field. We do this in order to ground our argument within current expectations for educational leaders and to show how current expectations do not sufficiently allow for racial and dis/Ability equity-oriented leadership to grow when interfacing with IDEA. We argue that although the core principles of IDEA are expansive, they are also fundamentally flawed and thus limit the capacity of leaders to truly strive for dis/Ability and racial equity and justice.

Leaders are expected to assure that their schools and districts have the proper supports in place to identify those students who have a disability and need special education (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)[3]) services within their school and as determined by an eligibility process aligned with IDEA evaluation requirements (20 U.S.C. § 1414 (a-c). Yet the IDEA eligibility process is influenced by stereotypic and individualized views of disability (Perlin, 2009, p. 621), "individual and systematic bias" in child find which results in socioeconomic and racial disparities (Gumas, 2018, p. 415), and explicit biases and implicit associations which contribute to disproportionate representation in special education. Educational leaders must understand these influences and assure "non-discriminatory and equitable child find policies" occur (Grant, 2020, p. 127) in their schools.

Once identified, school and district level leaders are responsible for providing a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to eligible children (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)]1). The student's education program must be developed in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) (20 U.S.C. § 1414(d)(1)[A]) which must be created by a

properly constituted IEP team, which include the parent and the student (20 U.S.C. § 14(d)(1)[B]) and implemented by highly qualified teachers (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(14)[C]). However, FAPE is not a well-defined term and it must be interpreted on a student by student basis leaving room for individual discretion. In addition, there is an exceedingly low bar for FAPE, which fails to promote true individualization and student potential, and fails to articulate a reasonable progress standard (Cowin, 2018; Davison, 2016; Zimmer, 2018). Educational leaders must be aware of the dominant deficit-oriented and normalizing ideologies of the nature of disability (Annamma et al., 2013) which implicate the provision of FAPE.

The IDEA also requires that educational services be delivered in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)[5]). While well intended, Ryndak et al., (2014) note that the LRE principle legitimizes segregated placements. Sauer and Jorgenson (2016) proposed that the LRE continuum contributed to limited school experiences for students with more significant disabilities and linked the social practice of segregating students with more intensive needs to society's devaluation of disability and ableism. Reiner (2018) warned that the LRE continuum results in the "forced separation" of students with disabilities from non-disabled peers and "improper educational segregation" (p. 792). Educational leaders must provide a vision of inclusive placements for students with disabilities and professional development for educators to achieve that goal.

Educational leaders must also be (a) qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially designed instruction, (b) knowledgeable about the general education curriculum, and (c) knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the local educational agency (20 U.S.C. § 1414(d)(1)(B)[iv]).) The educational leader must guarantee that parents and children are afforded numerous procedural safeguards (20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)) and that building policies, procedures, and programs are consistent with state policies addressing funding, service provision, and personnel (20 U.S.C. § 1413(a)). These varied tasks require a significant amount of systemic, organizational, and legal knowledge on the part of leaders.

The IDEA compliance tools and accountability mechanisms available to educational leaders around the described tasks are often reported through State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Reports (SPP/APR). The reports are designed to ensure compliance with various provisions of the IDEA statute, which local education agency (LEA) special education leaders must gather data and report upon to their respective SEAs. The reports rely upon technical measures of student outcomes (e.g., graduation rates) and evidence of compliance with IDEA provisions, but they do not account for underlying equity and justice concerns that may arise at the local level (e.g., Voulgarides et al., 2021).

Specifically, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) provides states and LEAs with an Indicator Data Table for Measurement of State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators and local educational leaders are responsible for collecting, reporting, and monitoring data for the indicators and priority targets. Each state must then publicly report local school district performance for the fourteen indicators. Three of these Indicators—SPP Indicators 4, 9, and 10, relate to racial inequity in special education classifications, placements, and suspensions of students with dis/Abilities by race. Disproportionality scholarship focused on IDEA policy dimensions have revealed that OSEP's quantitative monitoring and interpretations constrained consideration of qualitative information pertinent to ascertaining whether patterns indicate a racial disparity or inequity (Sullivan & Osher, 2019, p. 400) and that the technical remedies are inappropriate for addressing such a complex equity issue (Cavendish et al., 2014).

> **Indicator 4**. This target requires that the rates of suspension and expulsion for LEAs and SEAs be monitored to assure these punitive practices are not disproportionately applied to students with IEPs, are not applied disproportionately by the race or ethnicity of those students, and that failure to comply with IDEA requirements for IEP development/implementation or for development of positive behavioral supports did not contribute to discrepancies or disproportionality.
>
> **Indicators 9**. The SPP target for Indicator 9 requires LEAs and SEAs to report the percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services that is the result of inappropriate identification.
>
> **Indicator 10.** This target requires the reporting of the percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disability categories that is the result of inappropriate identification.

Any school district across the United States can be cited via IDEA SPP Indicators 4, 9, or 10 if there is numerical evidence of disparities in either classifications, placements or suspensions by race and dis/Ability. The SPP indicators have not abated the issue (Albrecht et al., 2012) and there is considerable state variability around SPP Indicator 4, 9, and 10 implementation (U.S. GAO, 2013). To this point Strassfeld (2016) states,

> Current policy fails to adequately address disproportionality as a civil rights issue with accompanying remedies for traditionally under-represented racial and ethnic minority groups who are at-risk for discrimination within special education placements … (and) signals to parents of students with disabilities that IDEA's monitoring and enforcement provisions for disproportionate representation lack substantive sanctions at the state- and district-level when LEAs fail to comply (p. 1140).

The IDEA monitoring approach involves "shaming, blaming, and punishing the 'underperforming'" (Boeren, 2019, p. 280), which serves to rationalize public policy and gauge if the statute is meeting its legislative aims (Mahu, 2017). Policy analysts argue that the ambiguities and dysfunctions of such an accountability approach limit the opportunity for quality improvement in policy and practice (Hickman, 2022; Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020). Despite these issues, the SPP Indicator approach has become the primary means by which federal and state governments monitor and address racial inequity (e.g., Albrecht et al., 2012).

Thus, while the IDEA contains robust provisions and accountability mechanisms to assure the rights of students with disabilities are protected in schools and districts, the current and historical technicalities of IDEA, from a social justice lens, are insufficient. In turn, policies such as IDEA are inherently limited in their potential for engendering liberation, hope and equity for all. The preparation of educational leaders must be anchored in a justice and equity-oriented educational policy lens.

Moving Beyond Legal Requirements and Towards Justice and Equity

Given what leaders must know, the tools and resources they are provided via IDEA, and the need for more purposeful educational leadership and practice focused on equity and justice, we argue that future critical leaders must not only know what is required of them by IDEA, but they must also have the capacity to contextualize IDEA technical mandates in ways that account for longstanding racial and dis/Ability inequities as they collaborate and work with Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC families and youth with and without dis/Abilities. Therefore, we provide a critical framework that must be introduced alongside IDEA legal literacy in educational leadership preparation programs.

We root our call to criticality within the principles of disability justice which requires that white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism are challenged in policy and practice to dismantle ableism and racism (Berne et al., 2018). With this perspective we account for the underlying assumptions within the IDEA that need to be made explicit about the political, social, cultural, and economic implications regarding who benefits and who does not from the policy. In turn, we propose that education leaders be prepared to account for the ***technical*** (e.g., the principles of IDEA), ***contextual*** (e.g., student, teacher and parent voices and backgrounds and goals and dreams, etc.), and ***critical*** (e.g., issues of power and privilege and the role of intersectionality, etc.) aspects of policies and practices in the lives of BIYOC and their families inside and outside school systems. The lens must be presented ***in tandem*** with the need to understand the statutes and principles of IDEA. For instance, assuring IDEA legal literacy does not and cannot account for the spirit of inter-dependence found in disability justice principles (Berne et al., 2018). IDEA legal literacy promotes decontextualized, numerical, and technical policy solutions that do not recognize how the construction of ability and dis/Ability are connected to economic and political constructions of personhood that devalue any deviation from "typical," "normal," and "able-bodiedness," deeming dis/Ability as something to be fixed, remediated, and found via policy (e.g., Annamma et al., 2013). Given this, we define this operationalization and analysis of IDEA and special education as *critical special and dis/Ability studies in education*. Below, we begin to explicate how the lens can be used to promote critical use of IDEA through a case study.

A Case in Point: The Perils of Mandating Racial and Dis/Ability Equity

In this section we provide a vignette[2] that illustrates how IDEA legal literacy and technical compliance with IDEA are insufficient mechanisms for addressing the realities and needs of BIYOC students in schools. We provide the vignette so that the technical complexity of IDEA and the associated administrative burdens are illustrated to readers. The vignette may appear to present a simple problem of practice that can be easily remedied, yet its simplicity highlights how the critical, technical, and contextual elements of our framework are hidden when the law is taken at face value. Small compliance tweaks, which are easy to do, successfully mask underlying inequities through the guise of IDEA compliance. It is this ease, the ease of

2 The example is adapted from Voulgarides (2018) work on the intersection between IDEA compliance and racial and dis/Ability inequity in special education outcomes. The vignette takes place in a suburban locale because research has documented that a school district's location (e.g., suburban, urban, rural, and town) relates to the time frame within which a school district is able to address disproportionality (Voulgarides & Aylward, 2022).

unquestioned compliance with IDEA provisions, which must be named in order to foster a more just and equitable approach to special education leadership and IDEA administration.

***Sunderville School District** (SSD) was a socio-demographically diverse large suburban school district cited under IDEA SPP Indicator 4 for the high number of suspensions for students with dis/Abilities by race. Dylan [a BIPOC man and the assistant special education district administrator] was Lilla's (a BIPOC woman and the special education district administrator) self-described "foot soldier" and "hit man" for finding and addressing IDEA compliance issues in practice. Dylan said that in his first year in the district, he was able to "fix all of the noncompliance issues" associated with the citation and identified by the State "in a few months." He said the State compliance official who monitored the district's actions "appreciated" how swiftly the district had become compliant and that "he [the State official] had never seen a district become compliant so fast." Dylan was proud of his ability to facilitate compliance, but he was also aware of the limits of using compliance to address disproportionality. When Dylan found out the district would be cited again Under IDEA SPP Indicator 4, he was ready to "finesse the files" and "triage" which ones he thought the state would target in order to assure the district remained in full regulatory compliance. He admitted that he thought the IDEA compliance process was "all a horse-and-pony show," yet he felt obligated to make the changes because it was expected of him. "[Maintaining compliance] is great for me as a supervisor because I can fix little things, but it doesn't get to the root of the problem," which he attributed to racial and socio-economic tensions in the district.*

As the vignette illustrates, the district responses were perfunctory, quick fixes that resulted in minor adjustments to IDEA related paperwork and educational practices that symbolically "proved" compliance to state auditors, but did not actually engage with the critical, technical, and contextual elements that allowed for these perfunctory changes to occur unquestioned—all while discriminatory practices persisted in the district. Essentially, the leaders were able to take the corrective action required by a citation and indicated a level of IDEA legal literacy, but the related IDEA policies, procedures, and/or practices did not result in meaningful and substantive changes to practice that promoted racial and dis/Ability equity. The vignette also makes clear that educational leaders must move beyond IDEA compliance and towards critical understandings of how their IDEA administrative duties impact and sustain educational inequity through both reason and action (Burbules & Berk, 1999), as well as emotionality (De Sousa Santos, 2015; Zembylas, 2006; 2012).

In addition, when state education agency (SEA) auditors monitored the district's actions, they took paperwork evidence of IDEA compliance as an indication the district was addressing the locally occurring racial and dis/Ability inequity. The process obscured and evaded the individual and local practices which might provide insight into the "root" of racial, dis/Ability, and social-economic problems and inform reform efforts that are race, dis/Ability and other markers of difference conscious—a cornerstone for equity-oriented leadership.

The IDEA accountability mechanisms promote quick fixes to complex issues. These actions are harmful. They decontextualize the cultural-historical contexts of not only race-relations, but dis/Ability-relations inside and around schools (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Thorius, 2019) and the power of IDEA to further act as a tool of exclusion (Ferri & Connor, 2005). In other words, policy is not a neutral vehicle, but rather is ideologically and value driven (Linton, 1998; Purpel & McLaurin, 2004). Thus, uncritically complying with IDEA allows for unexamined power relations to persist and for inequities to continue under the guise of compliance.

Given this, educational leaders must not only know how special education systems work and what IDEA requires of them, but they must also know how to lead special education systems for racial and dis/Ability equity and justice by accounting for the technical, contextual and critical components of the practice of special education. A critical disability studies theoretical framework can be used to unpack how racist and ableist ideologies undergird the legislation, influence educational practice, and stifle the creativity and agency of educational leaders to imagine and create more just futures for students with dis/Abilities in schools, especially students who are multiply situated along race, gender, class, and language differences as they work to comply with the IDEA. In this sense, educational leaders will not only understand what is technically required via IDEA, but also how policy narratives influence local schooling practices that erase the sociocultural and intersectional lives of students within both special and general education (Hernández-Saca, 2017).

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

We propose that future critical leaders must be prepared to understand IDEA and also have the capacity to structure local district and school responses to the educational reality of racial and dis/Ability inequities which are sustained despite the accountability measures of the IDEA. Prospective leaders should be introduced to *policy as praxis* whereby critical consciousness is brought about not through intellectual effort alone but through praxis — through the authentic union of action and reflection and feeling (Burbules &

Berk, 1999). We suggest educational leadership preparation programs should focus on three key components related to IDEA administration and racial and dis/Ability inequity to assure prospective administrators have the knowledge and skills necessary to eradicate racial and dis/Ability disproportionality: 1) *Critical and Dis/Ability Educational Leadership Strategies,* 2) *Focused Critical Special and Dis/Ability Studies in Education Content,* and 3) *The Role of Professional Advocacy and Policy Development.* The content areas are further explicated below.

1. Critical and Dis/Ability Educational Leadership Strategies

The first content area will prepare future educational leaders to adopt a critical disability studies framework and an equity-oriented approach when implementing school policies and practices and reimagining the potential for policy to be used as a tool of liberation rather than oppression. For example, leaders will be provided with the meanings of four different models of dis/Ability—the medical, social, psycho-emotional, and intersectional models (Iqtadar et al., 2020)—so that the master narrative of the medical model of disability (Connor, 2013) is disrupted and issues of power, history, and identity are foregrounded in the daily practices of leaders to enable meso-level systemic change efforts for Disability Justice (Berne et al., 2018). Leaders will also be oriented to principles and tenets of Disability Justice and the framework of critical disability studies (Meekosha, & Shuttleworth, 2009), which includes centering disability within social, political, economic, cultural, emotional, and psychological contexts as opposed to the medical model. The approach leads to more emancipatory frameworks for liberation, freedom, and human dignity grounded in an interdisciplinary and intersectional model of dis/Ability.

We recognize that leaders must not only personally and professionally develop, as outlined above, but they must also focus on achieving equity-at-large. For example, Fergus (2016) provides district and school-based staff the tools needed to examine locally occurring disparate patterns in gifted and talented placements, attendance, special education placements, suspensions rates and so forth—disaggregated by race, dis/Ability, gender and more, to inform district- and school-level responses to educational inequities. These nuanced analyses are impactful for systems change and can be coupled with mindset shifts that foster justice-oriented approaches to leadership.

Educational leadership preparation programs must also work to foster intersectional competence (e.g., Boveda & Weinberg, 2022). Doing so would assure that technical policy remedies will not and cannot be administered devoid of context, identity, and dynamics of power and privilege within local contexts. Boveda and Weinberg (2022) developed an intersectionally conscious collaboration protocol for teacher educators, which is based upon intersectional competence sub-constructs. We see value in applying and slightly adjusting these insights for educational leadership development. For example, the protocol requires educators, and we also submit leaders, to engage in instruction that includes student-oriented and collaboration-oriented considerations. For leaders, this could include collaborative and student oriented instructional programming, mission development, and fostering school learning climates that engage with a DisCrit Classroom Ecology model (Annamma & Morrison, 2018) designed to dismantle white and ability supremacy (also see DeMatthews, 2020). Another element of the protocol includes reflection and cogenerative dialogues to assist teachers, but also leaders, to challenge their assumptions about students and community members. The dialogues could strengthen collaboration inside and outside of the classroom and school, which is critical for building anti-racist and anti-ableist relationships and communities of learning that are team oriented (Daniëls et al., 2019). We suggest the protocol be considered as a tool that provides leaders with opportunities to engage in *policy as praxis* on the ground with their students, teachers, staff, and community members.

In addition to these tools, substantive educational reform will be required at the policy level so that leaders have more intersectional and robust policy tools to address racial and dis/Ability inequities—further described in *The Role of Professional Advocacy and Policy Development* content area.

2. Focused Critical Special and Dis/Ability Studies in Education Content

The second area assures future educational leaders will study special education law, policies, and practices through critical case studies and problem-based learning approaches, with rich opportunities for personal and professional reflection focused on educational racial and dis/Ability equity and justice. Administrator preparation programs must provide the key elements of effective, innovative educational leadership programs (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), including standards-based curriculum, field-based internships, and active instructional approaches to link theory to practice. The purposeful integration of conceptual frameworks addressing dis/Ability into these preparation strategies will be essential, as discussions of critical dis/Ability issues remain outside of current leadership discourse (e.g., Pazey & Cole, 2013).

Given this, administrator preparation programs must include instructional content related to divergent and interdisciplinary conceptualizations of dis/Ability and Disability Justice as it pertains to the work of leaders in schools and districts (see Bateman

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& Bateman, 2014; Berne et al., 2018; Crockett, 2019; Hernandez-Saca et al., 2022). The critical lens must be aligned and integrated with the National Board Standards for Educational Leaders, which require administrators to (1) confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and dis/Ability or special status (Standard 3 Equity and Cultural Responsiveness); and (2) know, comply with, and help the school community understand local, state, and federal laws, rights, policies, and regulations so as to promote student success (Standard 9 Operations and Management) (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Such alignment will establish an integrated framework of inclusive social justice leadership (Pazey et al., 2012), which is interdisciplinary and intersectional in nature.

The work can also be supported through critical case studies and problem-based learning approaches that provide rich opportunities for personal and professional reflection. By marrying a critical lens with the technical work of leadership, preservice programs will better address the "dissonance between what educational leadership preparation programs are providing future school administrators and their on-the-job demands" (McHatton et al., 2010, p. 13). Thus, this content module should include the study of the IDEA compliance monitoring requirements within a socio-historical and cultural context—including the compliance indicators and with a focus on the disproportionality indicators. In doing so, future leaders will acquire the necessary IDEA legal knowledge while simultaneously recognizing the 60-year history of racial and dis/Ability inequities. Leaders can identify how they can become a mechanism for change when addressing the long-standing inequity, rather than an accomplice which highlights the policy to praxis imperative. This includes orienting future leaders to frameworks that engage with the field of Disability Studies in Education and Critical Race Theory (e.g., DisCrit; see Annamma et al., 2013).

Selected chapters and quotes from the following three books can serve as content to engage in self and group study whereby leaders develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to grapple with the intersections of race and dis/Ability as it applies to policy and practice:

- Harry, B., & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, L. (2020). *Meeting families where they are: Building equity through advocacy with diverse schools and communities.* Teachers College Press.
- Fenning, P. A., & Johnson, M. B. (Eds.). (2022). *Discipline disparities among students with disabilities: Creating equitable environments.* Teachers College Press.
- Voulgarides, C.K. (2018). *Does Compliance matter in special education? IDEA and the hidden inequities of practice.* Teachers College Press.

This content based work requires educational leaders to engage with interdisciplinary tools of reflection, such as self-study in teacher education (Kosnik et al., 2006) which will invite leaders to self-reflect on not only their ***professional*** (e.g., professional roles, legal responsibilities, etc.) and ***programmatic*** (e.g., curriculum, assessment, school-wide policies and practices, local and state and national education policies) selves and responsibilities, but also their ***personal*** (e.g., positionality, identities, biography, and life experiences across time, etc.) selves as agents in an educational system. This is imperative because, in doing so, leaders will begin to engage in critical emotion praxis that accounts for the ***technical*** (e.g., the principles of IDEA), ***contex-***

tual (e.g., student, teacher, and parent voices and backgrounds and goals and dreams, etc.), and ***critical*** (e.g., issues of power and privilege and the role of intersectionality, etc.) components of human interaction in education that relate to IDEA provisions (e.g., Zero-Reject/Child Find, Free-Appropriate-Public-Education, the Least Restrictive Environment, the Individualized Education Program (IEP), etc.).

3. The Role of Professional Advocacy and Policy Development

The third area will prepare future administrators to promote change at both the individual-, student-, and systems- level by serving as active social agents tackling racial and dis/Ability inequities at a broad scale. Through this strand, educational leaders can expand their role beyond the school and district context to influence educational policy development (Derrington & Anderson, 2020).

Advocacy and activism are critical components of an educational leader's work. Advocacy and activism have long been characterized as the process of "giving voice to those without voice or whose voices are not heard" by conceptualizing social needs, empowering those involved with mental health service provision, and identifying systemic complexities and barriers (Gray et al., 2020, p. 2) along social markers of differences such as race and dis/Ability. Leaders are uniquely situated to not only speak, but act with students and families to community stakeholders and state and local policy makers. Thus, professional advocacy and activism can be used to inform the public about current issues in schools and the education profession: "they [leaders] have insider knowledge about which new services to establish and which existing ones to expand or improve" (Bond, 2019, p. 77) due to the nature of their work. Relatedly, administrative advocates and activists can provide pragmatic solutions for system changes because of their daily intersection with current educational policy, students, and families (Bradley-Levin, 2018; Weber et al. 2020). Therefore, this content area can prepare future administrators to understand both the role and the effects of professional advocacy and activism.

We want to be clear, however, that in promoting activism and advocacy we do not give voice to parents or students, since they already have voice. Rather, leadership preparation programs should promote activism and advocacy that leverages the tools and strategies of effective leaders to elevate caregiver, student, and community needs. Prospective educational leaders must study advocacy and activism as an ethically, morally bound, and legally protected activity, which includes promoting intervention at both the individual student level and the broader systems level (Oyen et al, 2020). In this way, future leaders will serve as active social change agents who identify and tackle inequities at their systemic roots, disrupting the long-standing norms and practices that can contribute to educational racial and dis/Ability equity. The approach implies future leaders must be active social change agents who serve as critical advocates and activists involved in advancing legal and sociopolitical movements inside and outside educational institutions (e.g., Scott & DeBray-Pelot, 2009).

For example, advocacy work could focus on expanding the policy tools leaders have to address racial and dis/Ability inequity in special education outcomes via IDEA. Advocacy efforts could be directed toward pushing legislators to consider how IDEA technical remedies and accountability mechanisms are limited in scope. The indicators, as currently structured, do not require an intersectional analysis, which is misaligned with our proposed framework. If this type of analysis and work were to occur, it is currently an undue burden on leaders, even though SEAs and LEAs must build the capacity to understand the indicators in relationship to each other and to broader structural inequities. These efforts should be formalized through policy.

For example, no such analysis is required for graduation rates or successful post-secondary outcomes (Indicators 1 and 14) despite research confirming discrepancies for BIYOC students. Elbaum et al. (2014) found that district level reporting requirements of the State Performance Plan do not account for racial and ethnic discrepancies when evaluating district graduation rates against state performance targets. Similarly, racial and ethnic analysis of transition goals and services (Indicator 13) might reveal some reasons for the concerning post-school data. Dropout rates (Indicator 2) are not disaggregated by race or ethnicity, despite empirical evidence of an increased risk for Black students (Bradshaw et al., 2008). The proficiency rates for academic achievement standards (Indicator 3) or improved preschool skills (Indicator 7) do not require an examination for racial or ethnic subgroups, although research confirms that the provision of a beneficial, appropriate education is not achieved equally when comparing white students with dis/Abilities to their BIYOC counterparts (Artiles, 2019). Pak and Parsons (2020) propose that an analysis of instructional practices for students with dis/Abilities, particularly BIYOC, should "explicitly examine equity gaps when analyzing the effectiveness of inclusion or differentiation practices, rather than centering identity-neutral implementation factors that complicate the work of educators" (p. 3). The failure to report placement data in general education (Indicators 5 and 6) for racially and ethnically diverse students and to develop plans to remedy exclusion is not responsive to empirical calls for more inclusive settings for those students. Advocacy work for educational leaders could include efforts to expand these policy tools, as indicated here. And in line with the two other content areas described, this type of advocacy work would allow for a

critical special and dis/Ability studies in education lens to drive advocacy efforts in powerful ways.

In summary, these three content areas have the potential to provide prospective administrators the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that are necessary to confront racial and dis/Ability disproportionality, confront and alter marginalization and discriminatory practices, and improve educational outcomes for (BIYOC) – an approach congruent with systems-focused leadership approaches that center justice and equity (Honig & Honsa, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Educational leadership preparation programs must assure that prospective administrators have the critical skills, knowledge, and dispositions to meet the requirements of IDEA and effectively support social change and justice. These competencies, both legal literacy and a *critical special and dis/Ability studies in education lens*, have been a long-neglected area within university-based administrator preparation programs. By explicitly integrating our three proposed content areas, prospective administrators will be better prepared to achieve compliance with the IDEA, advanced critical racial and dis/Ability educational equity, and improve educational outcomes for all children, but in particular for Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color.

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