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Resisting Exclusion: Exploring Advocacy as a Core Practice Through Simulation

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Abstract

This study explores how teacher candidates (TCs) practice advocacy in the context of a clinical simulation, a one-to-one, live interaction between a learner (i.e., a TC) and a standardized individual (SI). We explore how TCs respond to an SI who suggests pulling students with disabilities out of an inclusive classroom, and how they narrate their approaches through post-simulation decomposition processes. Deductive thematic analysis of simulation transcripts and written reflections yielded three themes, demonstrating that TCs: stood their ground on inclusive practices, ceded ground to exclusive practices, or tried to find common ground with the paraprofessional. Findings from this study highlight sought-after collegial common ground and the critical decomposition of practice portions of the learning cycle, implicating the need for novice teachers to practice within multiple, high-structure engagement and decomposition opportunities.

Keywords

Clinical Simulations, Advocacy, Inclusion, Practice-Based Teacher Education

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Introduction

Communicating well within the teaching profession takes practice. Educators communicate with parents, students, administrators, fellow teachers, and other colleagues daily, and must balance the contexts of each group with the communication objective. One form of communication – advocacy – requires communication skills that challenge power in order to transform practice. At times, the teacher-as-advocate must use resistance, such that the teacher acts as a line of defense for a student. In consideration of the approaches, contexts, and communication channels educators employ in advocacy for students, it is important to consider how teachers learn to advocate.

As some educator preparation programs utilize practice-based preparation models, we see an opportunity to examine how novice educators practice advocacy – an individual or collective practice, including resistance, to address issues of equity and social justice in schools (Peters & Reid, 2009). Clinical simulations are a form of practice-based education that illuminates the skills and dispositions of educators in live time. In this study, we employ a distinct simulation to challenge teacher candidates (TCs) to articulate collaborative supports for students with disabilities. As TCs engaged in both simulation and post-simulation reflection practices, our research questions examined if and how they engaged in advocacy:

- RQ1 - *How do TCs respond to a paraprofessional who wants to exclude special education students from an inclusive classroom during a simulated conversation?*
- RQ 2 - *Through debriefing and written reflection processes, how do TCs narrate their responses in the clinical simulation to the paraprofessional?*

Literature Review

Practice-Based Teacher Education

There has been an ongoing debate in teacher education on how to effectively prepare novice teachers for the field, often dichotomously framed as a result of a *theory/practice gap*. Practice-based teacher education (PBTE), then, has emerged as a way to strengthen the connections between theory and practice by explicitly teaching novice teachers to enact and use a set of core, high-leverage practices (Loewenberg Ball & Forzani, 2009; McDonald et al., 2013; Zeichner, 2012). Core practices share common characteristics: they occur with high frequency across content areas and grade levels, novices can master them, novices can use the practices to learn about teaching, and the practices preserve the complexity of teaching, and they are research based (Grossman, Hammerness, et al., 2009). Because core practices occur with high frequency, TCs can learn more as they engage with them over time, though importantly they should not be "decontextualized or oversimplified, preserving the integrity and complexity of teaching" (Mathewson Mitchell & Reid, 2017, p. 48). Grounded in research and showing positive learning effects (Hanley et al., 2019), the practices constituting PBTE – in addition to fieldwork – help novices develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for the work of professional teaching (Grossman, Compton, et al., 2009; Matsumoto-Royo & Ramírez-Montoya, 2021).

Grossman, Compton, and colleagues (2009) suggest the development of core practices through a three-phase learning cycle, where TCs engage with representations of practice, decompositions of practice, and approximations of practice. In this study, we specifically focus on approximations and decompositions of practice that run parallel to the practices of a licensed professional and allow novices to navigate professional situations with less complexity (Grossman & McDonald, 2008). Approximations range in authenticity – from distinct role plays to all-encompassing student teaching experiences – helping TCs practice particular skills and dispositions and often receive immediate support and feedback. We also focus on decompositions of practice, which involve breaking down the parts of practice into smaller, more manageable elements. Decomposition of practice allows novices to attend to the components of teaching, before enacting them in repeated situations or full professional context.

One specific approximation structure – that of *clinical simulations* – (Dotger, 2015; Dotger & Chandler-Olcott, 2022), challenges TCs to engage in a range of K-12 situations. Diffused directly from medical education's long-standing use of standardized patients in medical simulations (Barrows, 1987), a clinical simulation is a one-to-one, live interaction. In the live simulation, a learner (i.e., a TC) meets with a standardized individual (SI), an actor carefully trained to consistently portray a character such as a concerned parent or disgruntled colleague (Dotger, 2015). As a pedagogical structure, clinical simulations in teacher preparation programs generally use a three-phase structure that includes preparing for a simulation, actively engaging in a simulation, and finally debriefing and reflecting on the simulation experience (Angelini, 2023; Dotger & Chandler-Olcott, 2022).

The purpose of a simulation is to provide opportunities for TCs to make decisions and communicate in ways that simulate professional interactions of teachers (Dotger, 2015, p. 217), in an environment that is intentionally bounded and reduces professional risk. Some authors have suggested that simulations are a form of PBTE, noting that simulations allow reduced-risk rehearsal of core practices, such as partnering with stakeholders (Khasnabis et al., 2018). Simulations have been used to practice a variety of scenarios that teachers may encounter and may include digital avatars in mixed-reality simulations or live-actor simulations. For example, simulations have allowed TCs to practice leading book discussions to elicit student thinking (Moody & Finkelstein, 2024), use questioning strategies with multilingual learners (Davies et al., 2020), or support TCs practicing mathematical discourse skills (Zhou, 2024). Simulations also support situations that TCs are unlikely to experience through more traditional field experiences. For example, live-actor clinical simulations have been used to practice skills around student crises and family engagement (Dotger, 2009; Dotger et al., 2008). Other literature reveals how simulations have been implemented to approximate professional conversations with colleagues, in which TCs have practiced advocating for marginalized learners, including multilingual learners (Chang-Bacon et al., 2023; Fundalinski & Dotger, 2025) and students with disabilities (Dotger & Ashby, 2010).

Inclusive Educational Practices

Building from the broader foundation of PBTE and simulations as approximations of practice, we turn our focus to inclusive education practices. The term 'inclusion' is utilized on a range of fronts: from racial inclusion (Brown, 2025; Keddie et al., 2021) to financial inclusion (Kazemikhasragh & Buoni Pineda, 2022) to LGBTQIA+ inclusion (Brant & Willox, 2023; Munsell, 2023). For this study, we focus on inclusion of students with disabilities, with an acknowledgement that their identities may intersect. We build from Bradley-Levine's (2021) critical ethnography study on teacher's advocacy for inclusion, where inclusion is noted as, "a combination of practice and principle... students with [disabilities] have the opportunity to learn the same curriculum as students who do not have [disabilities] in the context of the general education classroom, but with additional supports and structures" (p. 64). We also position inclusion through the lens of disability studies in education, considering disability as a social, cultural and political construct where social environments – rather than an individual person – create ability and disability binaries (Ashby, 2012). Inclusion through the lens of disability studies seeks to challenge and disrupt ableism and intersecting forms of oppression, including racism, and to advocate for more equitable systems (Baglieri, 2020).

Though Bradely-Levine's definition comes from a recent study, the idea of inclusive education is far from new. With its origins in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, inclusive education has been broadly recognized as a best practice for all students (Hossain, 2012). While inclusion is recognized for its benefits for all students, it is sometimes implemented imperfectly and/or with unease (Chairunnisa & Rissmita, 2022; Smith & Larwin, 2021). Thus, when TCs enter teacher preparation programs, they may have witnessed or experienced imperfect models for how inclusion should be practiced in K-12 schools, which present an opportunity for practice-based approaches, including simulations, to offer an alternative model of practice (Waychunas, 2025). Encouragingly, TCs commonly have positive attitudes towards inclusion, with those TCs in dual programs (those seeking a special education teacher certification in addition to a second teacher certification) demonstrating more positive attitudes (Kim, 2009).

While the thoughtful disposition of TCs is a solid starting point, it must be complemented with skill acquisition and rehearsal, such that TCs are prepared to enact inclusive practices in future licensed practice. Many studies acknowledge that TCs need to be prepared for the many aspects of inclusive teaching, such as differentiating class materials and collaborating with co-teachers (Allday et al., 2013). These are important, skill-based steps forward. In addition to these examples and others, though, we suggest *advocacy-for-students* is a skill that TCs must practice. While there is limited literature that acknowledges advocacy as a skill (i.e., Dotger & Ashby, 2010), advocacy is acknowledged in the broader teaching space as an essential component of inclusion (Bradley-Levine, 2021). We build on Dotger and Ashby's (2010) call for situating advocacy as an essential element of inclusive teaching. In our study, we intentionally utilize the same simulation as that

Dotger and Ashby (2010) did fifteen years earlier but advanced the line of work with a specific focus on advocacy as a skill to be practiced and decomposed.

Advocacy As Practice in Teacher Education

Preparing future educators to advocate and work towards social justice and equity for students with disabilities is a crucial objective (Cochran-Smith, 2019). Thoughtful, evidence-based advocacy on behalf of students with disabilities anchors the preparation conversation, making space for both broad inclusive ideology and concrete, equitable steps forward that can be rehearsed through practice. This balance – where inclusive ideology and practice work in concert – is particularly important in light of critiques that PBTE and the core practices movement peripheralizes justice (Philip et al., 2019). Peters and Reid (2009) define advocacy as "acting individually and collectively to effect social justice through equity in teaching and learning in schools" (p. 556). Advocacy is thus a strategic practice to address issues of social justice occurring in classroom settings and more broadly in spaces that impact teaching and learning (Peters & Reid, 2009). Advocacy is additionally framed through teacher activism (Picower, 2012), teacher agency (Pantić, 2017), having a critical stance (Warren, 2021), resistance (Peters & Reid, 2009), or an inclination towards *action* in pursuit of social justice, often involving influencing policy and laws. For special education teachers, advocacy strategies within the school and classroom include developing relationships, offering expertise, compromising, or finding commonalities (Whitby et al., 2013). Given the breadth of definitions of advocacy as well as the practices in teacher preparation, we focus here on advocacy as a form of resistance, linking disability studies and teacher education as integral efforts to disrupt traditional, exclusive power structures and discourses in K-12 school structures (Gabel & Peters, 2004; Peters & Reid, 2009).

Resistance as a form of advocacy works in concert with discursive practices – or rules that control language and practice – in order to transform practice. Resistance occurs when teachers are critically self-reflective and knowledgeable of the barriers and systems that marginalize students with disabilities (Peters & Reid, 2009; Rood, 2021), such as stereotypical representations – master narratives – of students with disabilities (Bacon & Lalvani, 2019) or intersectional forms of oppression impacting students with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2014; DeMatthews et al., 2020). Teachers might resist dominant discourses in special education by "working the cracks" (Collins, 2013) to leverage the law and to support family advocacy efforts through their disability studies in education identities. Rood also found that despite active resistance – for example, in teachers demanding a paraprofessional to support students with disabilities in a general education class – there are times when teachers remain silent, unable to advocate daily because of the systems and structures in schooling and feeling apprehension of speaking out. As a result, we see that advocacy broadly, and resistance in particular, requires that teachers are prepared to be "risk-takers and advocates who can step outside conventional boundaries" in order to challenge the status quo and speak out against oppression (Peters & Reid, 2009, p. 558).

Developing capacity for risk-taking – which involves challenging power – requires nurturing TCs' confidence in their ability to advocate and developing skilled communication (Liebovich & Adler, 2009). Indeed, skillful communication is a necessary attribute for advocacy (Associate of Teacher Educators, 2022). Raymond and colleagues (2023) explored case studies of how teacher leaders engaged in advocacy, finding that strong role-models, feelings of success and confidence with past experiences, and motivation to act on issues of social justice were important experiences in becoming advocates. Peters and Reid (2009) suggest that university-based programs aid in this process by designing learning experiences that allow TCs to apply their knowledge of disability studies and inclusive practices in authentic, embodied experiences, with space for critical reflection. Although core practices often include strategies for teaching – for example, guided questioning or modeling – we suggest that disposition and skills in advocacy are integral to teaching, fundamental to supporting equitable student learning (Raymond et al., 2023), and can be learned and practiced.

Methods

Simulation Design

This study centers on the long-standing *Elizabeth/Elliot Meyers* simulation, which fosters a professional conversation around inclusion (Dotger & Ashby, 2010). In simulation, individual TCs initiate a 'getting acquainted' meeting with a paraprofessional for students with disabilities. By design, the objective is for novice teachers to interact with the standardized individuals (SIs) portraying Meyers, who articulates a history of – and desire to continue – pulling students out of the general education classroom to provide services. This intentional design contrasts a novice, certified teacher in an interaction with an experienced, uncertified paraprofessional. Both parties – the teacher and the paraprofessional – bring to the proverbial table their professional expertise. The *Meyers* simulation challenges TCs to rehearse exploring and recognizing the wisdom of experience that the Meyers paraprofessional offers, while also practicing establishing their broader pedagogical approaches to including (or not) students with disabilities. By design, power is a part of the professional equation and the hierarchy is murky. The novice teacher is the licensed teacher-of-record, while the paraprofessional holds the power of experience over time. The novice teacher has only limited, pre-service experience with inclusive practices, while the paraprofessional has utilized exclusionary structures for years. The 'third party' that operates independent of both the paraprofessional and the teacher in this initial getting acquainted conversation – is the data for each of the three students with disabilities. Importantly, the paraprofessional's desire to pull the students out of the classroom is not informed by any Individual Education Plan data for the three students with disabilities.

Learner Protocol

One week before the simulation, the learning cycle begins when the cohort of TCs receives the Learner Protocol. Although the participating TCs are still working toward certification, for the

purpose of the simulation, the Learner Protocol situates the TCs in the near future, having graduated, earned state certification, and serving as a first-year novice teacher working at the fictional middle/secondary Smithfield School. Depending on the certification area of the TC, they are situated as a first-year teacher in either 6th or 9th grade. The Learner Protocol indicates that each TC will have one paraprofessional working with them full-time in order to support three students with disabilities. With the simulation situated two weeks before the start of the school year, the TCs have arranged a 'getting acquainted' conference with the paraprofessional to introduce themselves, talk about the classroom environment they hope to foster, and to discuss the logistics of the beginning of the school year. Importantly, the Learner Protocol does not script or direct what the TCs should say or do; instead, TCs are encouraged to use their best professional judgement and prepare accordingly.

Standardized Individual (SI) Protocol

In preparation for the simulation, multiple actors are recruited and trained according to a Standardized Individual (SI) Protocol. Unlike the Learner Protocol, this document directly scripts multiple actors who will all enact the Elizabeth/Elliot Meyers persona, in simulation with each TC. Training for the actors portraying Meyers was conducted by the third author and simulation center staff in a 90-minute session one week before the simulation. The protocol details the context of the simulation, important background characteristics and disposition, and specifically scripts multiple "verbal triggers" that each SI will issue to each TC in the simulation, including:

- Meyers expressing, "I've been doing this work for quite a while, and feel like I know what these kids need;"
- Meyers using possessive, territorial language in stating: "I want my students to feel comfortable and I don't want them to feel frustrated or upset;"
- Meyers clear expression that, "it is sometimes easier if I pull my kids out of class and get them away from everyone else so we can really bond and focus on our own work."

In addition to these verbal triggers, SI training focuses on how each SI should respond if the TC resists Meyers' intent to pull the kids with disabilities from the classroom. If TCs offer resistance, the SIs are coached to seek clarity, by stating, "Well, I've only done this by pulling the kids. So, help me out here. Paint me a picture as to how you'd like to include my special needs students in your larger classroom."

Importantly, these SI verbal triggers are exclusionary statements and perspectives, based solely on how the Meyers paraprofessional prefers to operate and not on any student data (e.g., Individualized Education Plans).

Simulation Objective and Connection to Participant Contexts

The objective of the *Meyers* simulation is to provide TCs an opportunity to practice navigating calls from a more experienced, but uncertified colleague to exclude students with disabilities from

the TC's general education classroom. This simulation and the subsequent study of the video data was conducted at a predominantly white, research-intensive institution in the Northeastern United States in the University's School of Education. The School of Education offers a dual certification in either Inclusive Childhood Education (Grades 1-6) or Inclusive Adolescent Education (Grades 7-12) and Students with Disabilities (K-12). All TC participants had either taken, or were currently enrolled in, a course that explored disability perspectives; all but one TC had either taken, or were currently enrolled in an additional, introductory course on inclusive schooling from a disabilities studies perspective. That is – the majority of TCs in this study had coursework that introduced the concept of fully inclusive education.

The principle of a full, inclusive education undergirds the school of education in which these TCs are studying, and by design, serves as the central context in this study's simulation. As outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), we expect novice teachers to advocate for the least restrictive environment (LRE) at each curricular and personnel-related decision point for a student with a disability. Removal from the general education classroom occurs only when absolutely necessary. Absent any formal requirement (e.g., testing directions in an Individualized Education Plan) for more restrictive instructional or supervised learning environments, our expectation is full inclusion. This principle is meant to center students and their academic and social needs. Additionally, this principle guards against exclusionary default mechanisms because students are different, or because the work of inclusion requires shifts in the professional practices of individuals or schools.

Data were collected in the Spring 2025 semester, in a required 1-credit course for TCs enrolled in all undergraduate teacher preparation programs. By design of this course, TCs engage in six different clinical simulations across the 15-week semester, practicing decisions, actions, and dispositions in simulations that approximate K-12 parent-teacher and colleague-to-colleague interactions. Each simulation initiates a broader learning cycle that includes post-simulation small-group debriefs, whole-class debriefs, individual analysis of video data, and data-informed written reflections based on the simulation and debriefs. The *Meyers* simulation was the fourth in this six-simulation sequence but represented the TCs first simulation with a standardized colleague.

Participant Demographics

Participants in this study (n=25) were all undergraduate TCs enrolled in either the inclusive childhood education program or the inclusive adolescent education program. The research team excluded the small number of TCs' data sets if they were in single-certification degree programs (e.g., Music or Physical Education) or did not complete the entire learning cycle (*Meyers* simulation and debriefings). Basic demographics are outlined in Table 1 below; although racial data were not collected, the majority of TCs presented as white.

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Degree Program	Gender	Year in Program
Sadie	Inclusive Adolescent Education	Female	Freshman
Olivia	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Nora	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Elise	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Hannah	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Steve	Inclusive Adolescent Education	Male	Sophomore
Elizabeth	Inclusive Adolescent Education	Female	Freshman
Joe	Inclusive Childhood Education	Male	Sophomore
Kennedy	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Quinn	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Layla	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Amelia	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Tessa	Inclusive Adolescent Education	Female	Freshman
Sean	Inclusive Adolescent Education	Male	Sophomore
Andrew	Inclusive Adolescent Education	Male	Sophomore
Sophia	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Alexander	Inclusive Childhood Education	Male	Freshman
Elena	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Morgan	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Charlotte	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Avery	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Sophomore
Grace	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Sophomore
Nathaniel	Inclusive Adolescent Education	Male	Sophomore
Josephine	Inclusive Childhood Education	Female	Freshman
Miriam	Inclusive Adolescent Education	Female	Freshman

Simulation and Debriefing Procedures

In alignment with the broader procedures for the established simulation-based course, TCs received their Learner Protocol one week prior to the *Meyers* simulation. At approximately the same point, seven actors were trained by the research team in strict accordance with the SI Protocol. On the day of the simulation, TCs reported to the School of Education's simulation center – a facility with multiple small conference rooms, equipped with multi-angle camera and microphone recording equipment. TCs' report times were intentionally staggered, such that six TCs reported every 20 minutes. This was their fourth simulation, and therefore no additional general orientation on the simulation process was offered. Upon cue from the research team, six TCs entered individual conference rooms, their doors were closed, and the recording equipment was activated. Then, the research team positioned six SIs portraying Meyers in front of each conference room door. Upon cue, all six SIs knocked simultaneously, and entered their respective rooms when the TCs answered the knock. With the unscripted TC and trained SI in the room together, the *Meyers* simulation began. TCs could conclude the simulation whenever they deemed prudent. If they exceeded an 18-minute threshold, though, a member of the research team would knock, open the door, and indicate they had an upcoming meeting (thus cueing the need to conclude the simulation).

Immediately following their individual interactions in the *Meyers* simulation, TCs transitioned to a different conference room for a recorded small-group debriefing with the second and third authors of this study as part of a paired decomposition of practice. The authors facilitated the debrief with prompts for TCs to reflect broadly on their effect and strategy, stemming directly from the simulation moments earlier. TCs were asked to consider: 1) What data did you bring into the simulation? 2) What did you learn while you were in the simulation or what data are you bringing out of the simulation? 3) What were your approaches while in the simulation? Additionally, though, the authors questioned and then coached each small group on who – the novice teacher or the more senior paraprofessional – holds ultimate responsibility for student learning in the classroom.

One week after TCs engaged in the simulation and small-group debriefing, they gathered as an entire cohort for a whole-group debrief. Unlike the small-group debriefing, all TCs had time to review their simulation video. To anchor the whole-group debriefing with simulation performance data, three TCs are preselected to showcase 1-2 brief simulation video segments for the broader class, speaking to why they selected that video segment to share. Then, the instructors (i.e., the second and third authors) led a brief discussion of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) – a provision in federal law that ensures specific rights for students with disabilities – what it means for a learning environment to be "appropriate," paraprofessionals' qualifications/credentialing, the intent vs. impact of well-intended exclusive practices, and further discussion of shared authority in fully-inclusive classroom environments.

At the conclusion of the whole-group debriefing, TCs are charged with individually analyzing their simulation videos, and constructing a written reflection using multiple data segments – identified by video time stamps – from their simulations to buttress their claims. The reflection and decomposition of practice is meant for students to comment on the application of the clinical simulation process, addressing specific pedagogical practices, and includes attention to: 1) strengths of their practice, 2) areas for improvement or growth, 3) and the professional responsibilities associated with the simulation.

Data Analysis

Transcripts of simulations, field notes from whole-group debriefings, and TCs' written reflection documents constitute our data corpus. To analyze our data, we used deductive thematic analysis (e.g., Braun and Clarke, 2006) to identify how the TCs responded and narrated the clinical simulation, informed by prior literature (Dotger & Ashby, 2010), and established simulation analysis procedures (See Dotger & Chandler-Olcott, 2022). We focused on both the simulation and the subsequent decomposition processes (debriefings and written reflection). After familiarizing ourselves with the data, the first and second authors first independently generated separate deductive coding lists and then discussed to reach consensus on a shared list of 18 deductive codes. That initial list centered on how TCs responded and narrated their broader learning experience (simulation, debriefings, written reflection), including, *Explaining Vision: Inclusion, Asking Clarifying Questions, Explicit Agreeing, Acknowledging Experience/Power/ Authority, Validating Concerns, Reclaiming Power*, etc. The first author coded the entire data set, surfacing and applying to the entire data an additional set of six emergent codes, including *Rationale for Inclusion, Desire to Collaborate, Communication Needs: More Assertive or Clear*.

After initial coding, the author team conferred again and began to interpret the data. After discussion of coding processes and resulting data, the team began to categorize the codes into themes. After discussion, the data yielded three themes: *Standing Ground, Ceding Ground,* and *Finding Common Ground.* Discussion of each of the three themes and the supporting data strands led to a third round of coding, focused only on the data strands supporting the *Finding Common Ground* theme. In the next section, we outline our three primary findings.

Results

Our data demonstrate that TCs responded in one of three primary patterns to a paraprofessional who wants to exclude students with disabilities from an inclusive classroom. We outline these three response patterns below, described as: *standing ground* (complete resistance), *ceding ground* (no resistance), and *finding common (conditional) ground* (resistance with concessions under certain conditions). We present our findings with broader examples from the sample and use data exemplars from three TCs to illustrate longer narrative simulation dialogue, debriefing, and written reflection excerpts.

Theme 1: Standing Ground: Resisting Exclusive Practices

Three TCs "stood their ground" to the paraprofessional's desire to pull students with disabilities out of the classroom. During the simulation, these TCs were collegial with their new colleague, often explicitly acknowledging the paraprofessional's previous experience or asking clarifying questions around how Meyers had previously supported students with disabilities in the classroom. Yet, when Meyers suggested pulling the students, these TCs actively resisted and stood their ground on inclusion. They described their rationale for why inclusion is necessary, like Sophia who shared "I think they have a higher potential, and I think if we put them in an inclusive classroom, that they would definitely be able to reach it with accommodations that we can provide for them." TCs also asked questions that demonstrated an attempt to push-back. For example, Layla asked, *"*...do you feel as though even taking them out of the classroom will cause a divide…?" and Sophia questioned, "You don't think they could achieve the same in a general classroom as they could in a small group setting?" At the same time, these TCs expressed their desire for continued collaboration, despite a difference in beliefs about classroom practice. In their written reflections, the TCs described wanting to be more assertive and confident in their stance, recognizing more concretely after the debriefing process the power and authority they have to make decisions about the workings of their classroom. To illustrate these findings, we highlight Grace's engagement in the simulation.

After initial greetings, Grace framed the purpose of the meeting to "know what our classroom's going to be like." Then, she subsequently shared information about herself as a first-year teacher and her desire for an inclusive classroom. At that point, Meyers issues the first verbal trigger. Grace asks follow-up questions about any past relationship between Meyers and the students with disabilities, learning the paraprofessional has not worked with this year's group of students. Meyers then shares he is an advocate of pulling the students with disabilities out of the classroom:

Mr. Meyers	I've always been a big advocate of pulling students out. I like to get them, my special education kids, into a smaller environment where we can just kind of focus as a group on our own thing and move at our own pace. I find the general education pace is a little bit fast, and when I can get my students, like I said, in a smaller group where we can give them the individualized attention that they like, I find that has worked great for me in the past.
Grace	Yeah, I think it's great to hear that kind of perspective from you. I do think for my classroom where we are going to make sure that the students are getting support while still being included, so making sure that they're getting those resources that they need, but trying to eliminate more of that pullout, just so that students feel as though every student is part of the classroom rather than just a smaller group. But it's very interesting and very helpful for me to hear your perspective on that. What do you think your strength is going into this year?

As Grace thanks Meyers and acknowledges his perspectives, she gently stands her ground on inclusion, stating she wants to "eliminate" pulling students out of the classroom. She follows this by again extending appreciation for Mr. Meyers' perspective and tries to move the conversation forward by asking about Mr. Meyer's strengths. Again, he reiterates exclusive practices:

Mr. Meyers	My strength? Just my experience. I don't have a problem in certain areas with the kids all being together, whether it's recess or school plays or school assemblies. But when it comes to academics, I've always been a big proponent of pulling the kids out and teaching them separately where they feel like, again, I like to make sure that they're feeling comfortable.
Grace	Yeah. I think that's a very helpful perspective to have, and I do think that we can work on that, and I think we can find a way to help so that the students know that they're a part of the classroom while they're still getting that individualized attention. So I think it's going to be a little bit of trial and error working together. I think the main point of this meeting that I wanted to emphasize was that we're a team, is that one of us has a strength that the other doesn't and vice versa. So you have strengths and I have strengths, and we are each unique people, but I think as long as we're working together, constantly checking in. I'm here for you, you're here for me, we're here for each other, and just making sure that that relationship stays connected.

Grace again stands her ground on keeping students in the classroom. She recognizes that there will be trial and error of trying to work together and puts forward a clear message of working collaboratively. Later, when Mr. Meyers asks Grace to paint a picture of the kind of environment of the classroom, Grace offers some examples of inclusive practices, including having the "same expectation for all students" with room for them to express their "needs in different ways," having "alternative forms of representation," and finding different methods of engaging students.

In her written reflection, Grace mentions she was taken aback by Mr. Meyers' proposal of pulling students out of the classroom, particularly given his limited knowledge about the students. She reflected with pride on being able to disagree with him and reinforcing her stance of having students with disabilities included in the classroom. She writes:

> While I am very proud of myself for sticking to my beliefs, the element that I was proud of would be the way that I handled validating what he said. I made the balance of being stern without being a big meanie. I said that I understood that he has done it this way for the last fifteen years, but this is the way we will be doing it for this next year.

Despite finding strengths, she also felt that she could improve her practice by being "even more assertive" in her beliefs. Additionally, she noted upon watching herself in the video that there were

many additional comments made by Mr. Meyers that she did not catch, which she felt warranted a response. She noted that:

> Sometimes I work myself so much that I forget to listen to each individual comment being made… since I am extremely passionate about having an inclusive classroom I had this sense of tunnel vision or tunnel listening skills sole (sic) focused on making sure I set my boundary instead of letting him talk so that I could hear his concerns. While I am still the boss even, I listen, I think he could have ended up agreeing with me in the end if I let him finish his point before reinforcing mine.

We read here that the mention of exclusive practices "worked up" Grace, such that rather than considering Mr. Meyers concerns, she was thinking about how she could set – and articulate – clear boundaries of her practice.

In reflecting on her professional responsibilities, Grace shared that it is her ethical responsibility to uphold principles of inclusion as a classroom teacher. Despite feeling the impact of gender and years of experience as points of disadvantage in the simulation with Mr. Meyers, she recognized her authority as the decision-maker and "boss" of her classroom, finding the simulation helpful in supporting her advocacy efforts for students.

Theme 2: Ceding Ground: No Resistance to Exclusive Practices

Five TCs "ceded ground" to the paraprofessional's desire to pull students with disabilities out of the classroom. Although Olivia attempted to share her desire to make students feel included ("I just want to make sure that all my students feel included…"), they generally agreed immediately with the paraprofessionals request and suggestions, moving forward in the simulation to figure out a plan for the year with this exclusionary practice. For example, after hearing the verbal trigger, TCs often asked clarifying questions about this process with undertones of agreement: "So then I guess, should I still include them in my lesson plans or is that going to be all you?" (Nathaniel). Of note, another TC (Alexander) conceded, but did so citing his own experience being pulled out for services, appearing to find this a meaningful and successful approach, sharing, "I had some trouble reading… we'd go to a separate classroom where we'd read more kind of easy-to-understand books." In their written reflections, the TCs recognized their inability to stand ground, citing the *Meyers* simulation as one of the most challenging of the four simulations they had experienced, and one which left them with a "weird feeling" (Elise), and having "no idea" why they would agree to the paraprofessionals demands (Olivia). In their written reflections, the TCs frequently mentioned the power the paraprofessional held, particularly highlighting the number of years the paraprofessional had been working at the school, with Nathaniel noting, "he had tricked me by saying he had 15 years of experience." In those same reflections, TCs also recognized the need to stand their ground and assert their authority.

As another illustrative example, we focus on Elise, who begins the conversation with Ms. Meyers by sharing that the purpose of the conversation is to be "on the same page" with the students with

disabilities. Later, Elise expresses desire to learn more about Ms. Meyers' role and how to support her in the classroom. Then, Ms. Meyers goes on to share the length of time she's worked in the school, along with her success in working with students. Elise shares her desire for the class to be inclusive and welcoming to all students, and asks Ms. Meyers directly what her role will be in the classroom:

Elise	So how does it work? Will you be there all day or push in?
Ms. Meyers	Well, I prefer to pull my kids out. Like I said, I've been doing this for 15 years, so I know what these students need and I know what works for them. And in a bigger classroom environment, it can just be a bit too distracting. I don't want them to have to deal with the other students or get frustrated because the teacher's asking them too much work or something like that. And so it's just easier for me to take them out so I can really focus on giving them what they need and making sure that we bond and focus.
Elise	Yeah, that sounds great. So would it be like you take them out and then bring them back for recess and those exact times except lunch so that they do get, because obviously a big part of going to school is the social interaction, so I don't want them to miss out on that. So would it be just during more educational times?
Ms. Meyers	Yeah, so the social part, like plays or music or art, recess, whatever, they can be a part to socialize, but I'll be addressing their academic needs on my own.
Elise	Okay. Sounds good. And then just how should, I want to make sure I can help them the most possible. So anything I should know to help them, you know the kids specifically, like going in or not yet?

Elise explicitly agreed with Ms. Meyers typical routine of taking students out of the classroom for academic learning and then asked clarifying questions about when the students would be pulled out, with additional qualifiers for why she wants the students to be included. Of note, Elise's initial description of her ideal classroom where all students feel welcome and supported was discarded when Meyers offered an alternative to that inclusive classroom vision.

In reflecting on her simulation, Elise shared that her strengths were in including the students as part of the social activities of school and having open communication with Ms. Meyers. Still, as Elise considered approaches that might need improvement, she also noted in her written reflection that while she was uncomfortable with the idea of pulling students out of the classroom, she took no action to resist this, stating:

> I had a weird feeling about her taking the students out for all academics because I had never heard about something so extreme. Yet I did not push back because of her many years of experience. I knew as soon as the SIM was over that I screwed up. The second I realized that she had never met the students, I should have suggested that we try including them in my classroom rather than have her take them out. I let the fact that she had 15 years of experience scare me, and I took her suggestion rather than advocate for my students. I knew this was happening during the SIM, but I didn't push back at all. She basically told me what she wanted to do and I just sat there and nodded. What I should have said back was something along the lines of "Do you think that's the best approach? We haven't met these students yet." Then maybe we could have gotten into a conversation about inclusiveness even in academic settings.

To her credit, Elise clearly recognized how she ceded power to the paraprofessional and acknowledged that supporting students with disabilities does not "automatically mean that kids should be in a different classroom." Encouragingly, in her written reflection, Elise further described how she wished she could have responded to this simulation, by acknowledging Ms. Meyer's experience but shaping the conversation with approaches like: "I'd like to try it this way first. If there's a problem, we can talk about making changes." In her analysis of simulated practice, Elise recognized her role in advocating for her students, putting students in the least restrictive environment, and taking more of an assertive role as a "boss" of the classroom, regardless of the years of experience the paraprofessional held.

Theme 3: Finding Common (Conditional) Ground

The vast majority of TCs in the study (n=17) were those that "found common ground" regarding the paraprofessional's desire to pull students with disabilities out of the classroom. That is, the TCs all referenced their desire for inclusive practices, made attempts at resisting Ms. Meyers traditional approach to working with students with disabilities, but still supported particular conditions under which students could be pulled out of the classroom. This finding aligns directly with Dotger & Ashby's (2010) finding around "conditional" inclusion. To tease apart and advance exploration of this theme, we explore not just the conditional practices in simulation but specifically focus on the conditions under which the TCs found common ground, exploring how they narrate their experiences through their decompositions of practice.

Through our additional coding efforts, we surfaced three conditions under which TCs agreed that students could be removed from the classroom by Meyers. Those exclusive conditions included *contextual conditions (*e.g., assignment, activity or specific time limit), *case-by-case conditions* (i.e., unspecified contexts), and *reevaluated conditions (e.g.,* after a period of time; after the first day, etc.). To exemplify the *contextual* conditions TCs agreed to consider their discussion with Meyers in removing students with disabilities during small-group activities, read-alouds, test-taking, or taking students out based on extra support after a whole-group lesson. Discussion also

ensued around difficulty of learning context, including references for inclusion for "simpler activities." Under the *case-by-case conditions*, TCs did not acknowledge any particular activities or assignments for which students should be pulled out, though agreed exclusion was allowed based on students' needs, for example, based on "something [impacting students] emotionally." TCs who attempted to resist any conditions of pull-out, but ultimately found common ground with Meyers, were those we classified as willing to *reevaluate conditions.* These TCs initially expressed reluctance to pull students out of the classroom but agreed to reevaluate after a period of time (i.e., one day, one week, one month) to determine whether or not it is appropriate to pull students out of the classroom. Across multiple transcripts this conditional dialogue suggested the TCs were trying to delay the decision-making process in order to initially have a civil conversation with a new colleague. For example, Tessa suggests she and Meyers keep students in the classroom for the first week and then reevaluate. "So I definitely want to ... I'd say, give them the first week in the classroom, see how things work, and then if you feel that this isn't at all possible, and we can't make any changes, then I guess, we'll talk about it."

After engaging in the debriefing process and watching their simulations, the written reflections of this group of TCs showed striking similarities: most wished to be more "rigid," have more "control" in the conversation, display more "confidence" in their beliefs, "stand ground" on inclusion, and ultimately "be the boss" and decision maker around inclusive practices. At the same time, TCs also noted feeling disarmed upon hearing the paraprofessional's reference to pulling students out of the classroom. They described being "thrown off" and "shocked" by the comment and were challenged by their own nervousness to find ways to share their vision of an inclusive classroom, while simultaneously wanting to be collegial and collaborative toward a new colleague. In their written reflections, TCs recognized they hold responsibility for creating the least restrictive learning environment for students, and as a licensed professional, should be the authority figure to advocate for such practices. And still, TCs reflected on feeling challenged – and at some points, intimidated – by the paraprofessional's 15 years of experience, as well as trying to navigate professional and collegial relationships. To illustrate these findings, we highlight Kennedy, who agreed to allow students to be pulled out of the classroom, under conditional *contexts*.

After Ms. Meyers initially shares, she would like to pull students out of the classroom, Kennedy shares her inclusive classroom goals, including collaborative activities, flexible seating and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), with lots of "assignment options and choices" and building relationships with families. She concludes her goal-sharing by then asking Ms. Meyers to reflect on how she (Meyers) feels about keeping the students in the classroom:

Kennedy So I just wanted to know your views on all of that and how you stand with having them maybe be a little more included and making sure that we try our best to keep everyone in the classroom.

Ms. Meyers	Yeah. I totally agree with you about having strong relationship with the parents. I know my students' parents very well. But what I prefer, what is easier for me, is to pull my kids out and work with them on my own because these students, it can be challenging for them. And I don't want them to be frustrated or feel like that the teacher is asking too much of them. And sometimes I have a hard time keeping up with the teacher in the classroom, so I'm able to better address my students' needs by taking them out and having them for most of the day.
Kennedy	Okay. That does make sense. I also think to that point, I want the students to feel like they're not being othered and so I don't know if full exclusion would be the best option here for me.
Ms. Meyers	Oh, they wouldn't be fully excluded… When there's recess and lunch and all of the social fun times, they can totally be included, but when it comes to their academic needs, I'll be trusting they are not.
Kennedy	Okay. I'm wondering if having them in class with me for my larger group instructions and then you pulling them out for some supplemental student work that I tell them to do after my lesson might be an option. Because I think that it's really important for me, as a teacher, to have them be listening to me teach and with the rest of the students and collaborating during lesson time. So I see how they need specialized instruction, but I think that you could provide that outside the classroom after I'm done teaching and that might work.

In her approach, Kennedy lays out a vision of an inclusive classroom, explicitly stating that she wants to ensure all students stay in the classroom, resisting Ms. Meyer's initial suggestion. When Ms. Meyers again reiterates her stance, Kennedy demonstrates an attempt to understand Ms. Meyer's perspective but still conveys her issue with excluding students from the classroom, particularly naming how students might feel "othered." When Ms. Meyers proposed timeframes for pulling students out of the classroom, Kennedy attempted to find common ground, suggesting that they can be pulled out only after large group instruction and for supplemental support work.

In her written reflection, Kennedy felt proud of how she shares her ideas to collaborate with Ms. Meyers, particularly in her attempts to make her colleague feel "comfortable and welcomed," despite differences in age and experience. In her written reflection, Kennedy cites pushing back on Ms. Meyers, not "fall[ing] into the trap of conforming to her preferences," and instead finding a solution that worked for both of them. She notes how she was not confident and somewhat hesitant about her perspective, writing:

> I am using my paper and notes as a bit of a clutch in this video as I watch it back, more than normal, so I'm not sure what changed or why, but I felt less sure about things I'm learning in school (2:20-2:50). In conclusion, when I watch it back I am acting as though I

> have imposter syndrome and don't believe I'm allowed to be saying certain things and using the words I am, even though everything I said was valid and okay (2:50-3:00).

When she had the opportunity to share her beliefs on inclusion, Kennedy appears to doubt herself and what she has learned. Still, when considering her professional responsibilities later in reflection, Kennedy again reiterates her stance on inclusion, stating that it is her ethical and moral responsibility to advocate for the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. She notes that while she feels the need to collaborate, she will do so "knowing that I am the one who makes the final call for the placements and pull outs, or lack of, for these students with disabilities."

Discussion & Implications

We begin our discussion by acknowledging a mentor study (Dotger & Ashby, 2010), which we consulted carefully and intentionally built from in crafting this study. Approximately 15 years prior, those authors surfaced themes centered on how TCs resisted, acquiesced, or struck conditional middle ground as they engaged in the same *Meyers* simulation. Our study employs the same simulation but is distinct in its examination of TCs at the beginning of their preparation program, and in its intentional attention to their debriefing and written reflection decompositions of practice. To surface one key finding – across two studies of the same intervention – and to advance the work of simulation analysis, our discussion focuses on how TCs sought a common ground stance with their new colleague, and how advocacy surfaces in their decompositions of simulated practice.

In this study, 17 (of 25) TCs work to navigate common ground between the full inclusion and the full exclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Upon hearing Meyers' reference to pulling students with disabilities out of the general education classroom, TCs responded with moderating language. Discourse markers in the form of "I think we could…" and "Maybe we should…." suggest novice uncertainty and possibly a desire not to fluster the more senior paraprofessional (Meyers) sitting across the table. In just a few moments of dialogue in our Kennedy example (above), we see conditional language ("maybe be a little more included") within the plea to "try our best to keep everyone in the classroom." Kennedy adds to her conditional language by focusing on feelings and optics, surfacing whether or not "students feel like they're not being othered." Kennedy does infuse a bit more concrete structure, though, to assuage some of the conditional language and feelings, acknowledging the possibility of "specialized instruction" and where that instruction might take place. Kennedy's dialogic common ground reads as the novice that they are – working hard in a new environment, unsure of where they are heading, and seeking collegiality.

Findings from this study, though, point to more finite, longer-term questions that honor the process of novice teacher development and hold high expectations for fully inclusive classrooms and

teacher preparation programs. As an author team of teacher educators, we asked ourselves in review of the broader data set, "Why do our TCs hedge?" We wrestled to understand why TCs consistently reduced down their language with softer, less decisive statements. From the demographics outlined above, we know TCs in this study had prior opportunities to learn about disability perspectives and ideas around inclusive schooling framed through disability studies coursework. Encouragingly, we see evidence of that learning, as TCs speak to the importance of full inclusion and belonging in the *Meyers* simulation. Our interpretation of this study's data set and TCs' prior learning experiences surface two key ideas. First, TCs need explicit practice in both naming what they want and clearly articulating how what they want manifests in everyday practice. Second, TCs need more exposure and practice with the different roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals. Both of these ideas hinge on how structured collaboration works in fully inclusive classrooms. In those spaces, teachers and paraprofessionals who effectively partner in support of students with disabilities know – through experience – how to communicate, plan, co-teach, and work independently in support of their collective student cohort. Building from this study, we seek to prepare TCs to articulate with specificity – devoid of hesitancy or hedge – the structured, collaborative practices with paraprofessionals that lead to fully including students in the general education classroom.

Our second point of discussion highlights the critical post-simulation decompositions of practice. As described above, TCs engaged in small-group debriefings immediately after each simulation, followed by a whole-group debriefing one week later. Then, they conclude the learning cycle with a written analysis of their simulation video data. These decomposition processes are not flashy. The 'simulation' often garners the spotlight, while the post-simulation decomposition work reflects the lengthier deeper dive into what was said and decided in simulation and their respective implications.

Earlier, we highlighted Grace's simulation, and her relatively staunch approach to inclusion. At first pass – and in consideration of Grace's novice status – she is showing leadership toward a fully inclusive classroom. The resolve Grace demonstrates in simulated practice highlights the necessity of parallel decomposition practices. That is – beneath the surface of Grace's performance lie decomposition opportunities that require careful scaffolds and performance data. For example, consider Grace's exchanges with Ms. Meyers, where she notes she wants to "[try] to eliminate more of that pullout, just so that students feel as though every student is part of the classroom, rather than just a smaller group." These are stances grounded by a fully inclusive ideology and ethos of community. While those are ethical stances from which to start, they point to the need for decomposition. We suggest that decomposition structures – in the forms of performance data and mentor teachers/teacher educators – can further buttress and strengthen Grace's position. To illustrate, consider that Grace did not reference in her simulation any consultation with special educators on staff or students' Individual Education Plan (IEP) documentation. In the decomposition of Grace's simulated practice, teacher educators and/or mentor teachers can illuminate in small- and whole-group debriefings these other variables for Grace and her peers. In

Grace's simulation, we take solace in what she said and find opportunity to structure her future stances on inclusion with a fuller consideration of others (e.g., educators, parents/guardians) – and the IEP data that support – specific inclusive practices in classrooms.

Just as mentor teachers and teacher educators can illustrate for novices the full range of considerations, so can the decomposition process of analyzing performance data. Elise illustrates this point well, simply stating in her reflection, "What I should have said…" This reflective stance conjures for us – as authors and experienced teachers – what novice teachers often say in reflection during late-afternoon conversation with their mentors in the school parking lot. In those countless moments, a dedicated novice teacher shares with a mentor how the next day in school – with a particular student, colleague, or parent – might be handled differently. In preservice teacher education, a similar process of pairing simulated practice with intentional decomposition of the resulting performance data, leads to enormous opportunities for TCs to carefully evaluate the resulting artifacts of teaching.

Encouragingly, we see these artifacts and markers of decomposition in this study. TCs who completely acquiesced to Meyers' preference to pull students from the classroom noted later in their written reflections those 'weird' moments of full secession. TCs literally cite in written reflection the time signatures from their videos when the moments of power differential surfaced with Meyers, as the more experienced paraprofessional expressed a clearer vision of what she wanted to do with the students with disabilities. Other TCs navigated their interaction with Meyers, using conditional language and working toward common ground. Encouragingly, their verbalizations in debriefing and their written analyses reflect those moments where shock and surprise essentially disarmed them. Important to this specific finding, we see written reflection data where TCs cite their language use. Using lenses, we discuss in small- and whole-group debriefings, TCs cite in their subsequent written reflections those moments where verbalized desire to be collegial with Meyers tapered quickly to the decision to exclude students from their classroom. Therein lies the beauty of video data in the decomposition process – in debriefing with peers and in individual written analysis – TCs are actively examining simulated practice for what it was in the moment, its end-result, and what amendments might yield in the future.

Findings from this study yield our two key discussion points of TCs' navigating collegial common ground and the critical decomposition of practice portions of the learning cycle. Both discussion points suggest one fundamental implication for teacher education: Novice teachers need multiple, high-structure opportunities to practice engagement and decomposition. In the context of advocacy for students with disabilities, this study and others call for the teacher-as-advocate to possess both a strong sense of professional self and a clear recognition of how one's advocacy impacts other persons and practices across K-12 structures. A strong professional identity, decisive language, and understanding one's impact on others do not result from singular moments of practice. Instead, imagine how subsequent simulations with this study's cohort – structured to include student data or IEP documentation – might provide TCs opportunities to engage in 'next step' discussion with

either Meyers or other building-level special educators. Designing multiple high-structure opportunities also means scaffolded opportunities for decomposition, where these TCs might look across multiple discussions of inclusive practice and examine how and where advocacy, student data, and paraprofessional experience can meld thoughtfully. Practicing advocacy within and across authentic situations – supported by teacher educators and performance data in later decomposition work – allows TCs to increasingly integrate inclusive ideology, student data, instructional practices and decisive language.

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