

Special Education Teacher Preparation for Family-Professional Partnerships: A Brief Report of the Results from a National Survey of Teacher Educators

Note: "FPP" refers to "family-professional partnership."

Research Questions

1. What perceptions do teacher educators have about the value of FPP preparation within the field in general, within their department, and within their own teaching/courses?
2. To what extent do special education teacher programs cover FPP-related content within FPP-specific (i.e., FPP content comprises 50%+ of entire course) versus non FPP-specific coursework (i.e., FPP content comprises <50% of entire course)?
3. What are the patterns of FPP-related knowledge and skills content coverage in FPP-specific versus non FPP-specific coursework across undergraduate and graduate instructional levels?

Results

1. **RQ1: Perceptions About the Value of FPP Preparation**
 - 96.5% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that FPP would be a key responsibility their teacher candidates would have upon graduation.
 - 72.6% agreed/strongly agreed that teacher preparation programs should dedicate at least one course for FPP content specifically.
 - 86.7% agreed/strongly agreed that faculty members in their programs value the importance of FPP in early childhood and/or K-12 settings.
 - A little over half were satisfied with the amount of FPP content covered in their department's program (54.0%) and with the time (54.9%) and depth (49.6%) of coverage in their own courses.
2. **RQ2: Extent of FPP-related Content Coverage**
 - **FPP-specific courses**
 - 55.8% ($n = 63$) indicated that in their programs, there was at least one full-time faculty member who emphasized FPP as a key part of their teaching, research, or service.
 - 48.7% ($n = 55$) reported that their departments' teacher preparation program included a course devoted largely (50%+) to FPP content.
 - 15 participants (13.3% of the full sample) reported that they were the current instructor of the FPP-specific course in their program.
 - All 15 participants indicated that the FPP-specific course they taught was aligned with teacher licensure or certification in their respective states.
 - **Non FPP-specific courses**
 - FPP content was covered at the lowest rates within technology and instructional methods courses.

- FPP content was covered at the highest rates within professional collaboration courses (e.g., courses that cover co-teaching, working with paraprofessionals, community collaboration) and courses focused on transition to adulthood.
3. **RQ3: Patterns of FPP-specific Knowledge and Skills Coverage**
- **FPP-related knowledge**
 - 75%+ of participants teaching FPP-specific courses reported including all 8 FPP-related knowledge indicators.
 - Participants teaching non FPP-specific courses had a wide range of coverage across the 8 knowledge items; FPP-related theory was covered at the lowest rates and content related to families of children with disabilities was covered at the highest rates.
 - Across FPP-specific and non FPP-specific courses, FPP-related knowledge was covered at similar rates across undergraduate and graduate offerings.
 - The 15 participants who taught FPP-specific courses had access to 3 additional survey items related to knowledge coverage as follows: (1) approaches to parenting, (2) family life cycle, and (3) abuse and neglect. Across all three items, participants reported coverage at rates of 75%+ for undergraduate offerings and 50%+ for graduate offerings.
 - **FPP-related Skills**
 - In general, FPP-related skills were covered at higher rates within FPP-specific courses compared to non FPP-specific courses.
 - Within FPP-specific courses, skills related to engaging families in their children’s learning at home and at school were covered almost 2 x as much in undergraduate offerings as contrasted to graduate offerings.
 - For non FPP-specific courses, skills were covered at roughly equivalent rates across undergraduate and graduate offerings, but the range/variability of skill coverage across all six FPP-related skills items was more limited than the range/variability for FPP-related knowledge items, suggesting that, on the whole, skills are covered more consistently than knowledge within non FPP-specific coursework.
 - The 15 participants who taught FPP-specific courses had access to additional 2 survey items related to skill coverage as follows: (1) skills related to taking care of oneself (e.g., mindfulness practice, self-compassion; $n = 9$ for undergraduate coverage and $n = 4$ for graduate coverage) and (2) skills related to perspective taking, such as empathy ($n = 12$ for undergraduate coverage and $n = 9$ for graduate coverage).

Implications for Practice

- Results suggest teacher preparation program models that include FPP-specific courses as a part of the curriculum offer a more frequent and consistent coverage of key FPP-related knowledge and skills.

- Results highlight a need to ensure that preservice educators receive adequate and balanced exposure to FPP-specific knowledge and skills in program models that infuse FPP content into existing courses.
- Teacher educators might benefit from using a set of guidelines regarding core FPP content and skills coverage within program planning to link FPP-related coverage with specific program coursework.
- Accompanying assessments/rubrics could be used to evaluate the students' demonstration of such FPP competencies. These FPP guidelines could be used at both the programmatic level and at the individual faculty member level to assist teacher educators in developing their syllabi—course objectives, content, and assessments—to further ensure that teacher preparation programs include adequate content and depth necessary to prepare their graduates to effectively work with families.

Method

Participants

- Participants were 113 faculty members instructing in a special education teacher preparation program within U. S. institutions of higher education.
- Most participants (61.9%) reported working in public universities as tenured or pre-tenured faculty (77.0%).
- An equivalent number of participants reported teaching courses related to high incidence disabilities (89.2%) and low incidence disabilities (75.2%).
- Forty-three participants (38.1%) indicated they had a leadership role within their department as the chair or coordinator of the special education program.

Measure: Teacher Preparation for Family-Professional Partnership (TP-FPP) Survey

- Survey questions were divided into four parts. Part 1 of the survey assessed the presence or absence of a course in the participant's teacher education program devoted largely (50%+ of content coverage) to FPP content. If present, participants identified the (1) FPP content and (2) FPP strategies/practices covered. Questions were presented in parallel form for graduate- and undergraduate-level coursework.
- Part 2 assessed the extent to which and how FPP content was covered within courses participants taught that devoted less than 50% of coverage to FPP content.
 - Participants were presented with the following list of nine course options: introductory content, instructional methods (e.g., literacy, math), assessment, behavior, transition to adulthood, policy or law, technology, collaboration with other professionals such as co-teaching, and "other."
 - Participants chose one of the following options for each of nine course options: (a) "I do not teach a course that covers content of this type," (b) "I do not cover

FPP content in any session of this course,” (c) “I mention families, but I do not cover FPP content explicitly within this course,” (d) “I embed FPP content within a few sessions of this course,” (e) “I embed FPP content within most sessions of this course.” or (f) “I embed FPP content within all sessions of this course.”

- Participants who indicated that they embedded FPP content within a few, most, or all sessions of any course were directed to a series of questions in a similar pattern as those included in Part 1: (1) the type of FPP content covered in the course and (2) FPP strategies/practices covered. Similar to Part 1, each of these questions were presented in parallel form for graduate- and undergraduate-level coursework.
- Part 3 assessed perceptions and experiences related to FPP content coverage within teacher preparation generally, as well as specifically within their program (8 Likert-type questions on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree).
- Part 4 consisted of a demographics questionnaire.