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Bringing High Leverage Practices to the Bluegrass: A Statewide Collaborative Effort

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Bringing High Leverage Practices to the Bluegrass: A Statewide Collaborative Effort

Abstract

As a means to improve instruction for all students, Kentucky joined the national network of states engaged with the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accreditation, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center. Part of this initiative was to hold a statewide summit for all Kentucky stakeholders in an attempt to build awareness of high leverage practices in educator preparation programs; strengthen and sustain partnerships; build capacity for continuous improvement; and share strategies for enhancing clinical practice. This article discusses the results of a survey given to those attending the statewide summit. Participants were asked to rate their knowledge and perceived importance of eight key variables associated with reimagining educator preparation in Kentucky. The results are discussed and next steps are outlined.

Keywords

teacher education, reform, high leverage practices

Introduction

Due to increasing accountability, teachers have been asked to improve their instructional practice to ensure that all students are achieving academic success. This difficult task becomes more challenging in the general education setting when the population they are teaching is becoming more diverse. In Kentucky, students with mild to moderate disabilities spend the majority of their time in the general education settings. Data from 2012-2013 reflect that 83.2% of students with a specific learning disability and 52.3% of students with an emotional disability were served in general education settings for more than 80% of their day (Kentucky Department of Education; KDE, 2016). Even with this increased access to the general curriculum, the achievement gap between students with and without disabilities in Kentucky persists. In 2014, 80% of high school students with disabilities were not proficient in reading and almost 90% were not proficient in math (KDE, 2016). For these reasons, it is crucial that teachers are equipped with practices that are essential to improving the academic and behavioral outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.

As a means to improve instruction for all students, Kentucky joined the national network of states engaged with the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accreditation, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center. The CEEDAR Center's mission is to help states, educator preparation programs (EPPs), and local education agencies (LEAs) align their professional learning systems to provide teachers and leaders effective opportunities to learn how to improve instruction in inclusive settings that enable students with disabilities to achieve college and career ready standards (CEEDAR, 2015). The EPPs that initially joined this new initiative, called Kentucky Excellence in Educator Preparation (KEEP), were the University of Louisville, University of Kentucky, and Thomas More College. These EPPs partnered with their LEAs and two state agencies, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the Education Profession Standards Board (EPSB), to form a State Leadership Team.

The KEEP State Leadership Team focused their work around the vision "Every learner taught by effective teachers and every district and school led by effective leaders to ensure excellence and equity." To achieve this vision, the team's mission is "To empower current and future teachers and leaders through intentional partnerships and experiences to implement and sustain evidence-based practices in multi-tiered supportive environments to ensure opportunities in excellence and equity for all learners." Leveraging the support of the CEEDAR center and the direction of the KEEP State Leadership Team, additional Kentucky EPPs are poised to self-evaluate their current coursework and clinical-based practices. One component of this self-evaluation, and a means to align the lexicon between general education and special education and across the learning levels of pre- and in-service, the KEEP State Leadership Team identified high leverage practices (HLPs) as a focus of the work. HLPs can be used in all classroom settings to increase student learning and behavioral outcomes (Ball & Forzani, 2011; McLeskey & Brownell, 2015). Using these HLPs as the foundation for discussion, EPPs across Kentucky are collaborating with their LEAs and each other to improve practice and set clear expectations for their pre-service teachers.

The KEEP State Leadership Team held a statewide Summit for all Kentucky stakeholders for the purposes of building awareness of HLPs in EPPs; strengthening and sustaining partnerships; building capacity for continuous improvement; and sharing strategies for enhancing clinical practice. Therefore, conference strands included areas such as HLPs; evidence-based practices, field work and practice-based clinical strategies, culturally responsive teaching and

equity, family engagement, district partnerships, recruitment and retention of high quality teachers, and accreditation and program improvement. The Summit was well attended with 152 participants. Of those, 19 EPPs and 6 LEAs were represented, and 23 pre-service teachers were in attendance. The Summit consisted of 20 group sessions with three panel discussions.

The Summit was planned, in part, to “scale up” the KEEP initiative by encouraging participation from additional stakeholders. In doing so, it was important to assess Kentucky stakeholders' knowledge and perception of importance in enhancing educator preparation across Kentucky in regard to the following variables: 1) high leverage practices; 2) evidence-based practices; 3) field work and practice-based clinical strategies; 4) culturally responsive teaching and equity; 5) family engagement; 6) district partnerships; 7) recruitment and retention of high quality teachers; and 8) accreditation and program improvement.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from the registration list for the KEEP Summit held May 20-21, 2018. A link was sent to each registrant, asking for their participation in the survey at the conclusion of the Summit. One follow-up reminder was sent a week later. Participants in the study were (a) stakeholders in educator preparation in Kentucky, (b) attended the KEEP Summit, and (c) consented to complete the survey. Consent was obtained through a cover letter with informed consent on the Qualtrics survey. Immediately following the cover letter, the participant was admitted into the survey. Fifty-one out of 158 attendees completed the survey for a response rate of 32.38%. Participants included 37 people from Institutes of Higher Education (IHE); one school district personnel; six higher education students, and seven people identified as other (i.e., state agency employee, instructional coach, educational co-operative consultant).

Procedures

The researchers developed a 10-question survey using *Qualtrics* software licensed through the University of Kentucky. The survey was designed to gather information about the participants' demographics and perceptions. The demographic block consisted of two to four questions regarding aspects of the participant's role, years of experience, and credentials, if applicable. The body of the survey was six questions designed to elicit information on the conference expectations and perceptions of knowledge and importance of the strands. Within this block, two attitudinal items provided insight into the participants' level of knowledge and belief of importance of the identified variables for teacher preparation in Kentucky. Participants were asked to rate their level of knowledge about each variable and their perception of how important each of the variables are in reimagining teacher education in Kentucky. These items were assessed through a continuous five-point Likert scale with the following indicators: “extremely knowledgeable” [5] to “not at all knowledgeable” [1] and “extremely important” [5] to “not at all important” [1]. The final two questions of the survey were open-ended questions requesting feedback on the conference for the purpose of continuous improvement. The participants were asked if there were specific topics not addressed at the conference that should have been, and for additional comments or suggestions on how the conference could be improved in the future.

Results

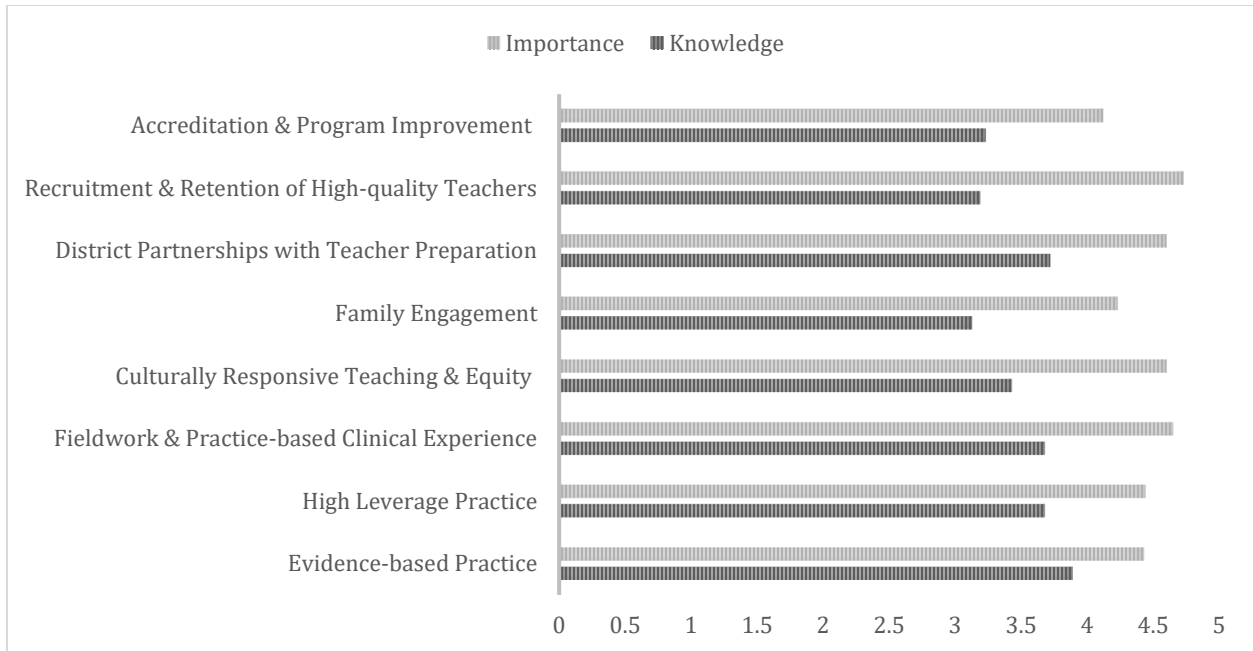
Mean scores of perceived knowledge and importance of variables in reimagining teacher education in Kentucky are provided in Table 1 and Figure 1. Results indicated that participants had a moderate knowledge of all variables, with the lowest being Family Engagement ($M = 3.13$) to the highest being Evidence-based Practices ($M = 3.89$). As for perceived importance, mean scores showed that participants found all variables to be very important in reimagining teacher education in Kentucky. Participants viewed the variable of Accreditation & Program Improvement ($M = 4.12$) as least important, and the variable of Recruitment and Retention of High Quality Teachers ($M = 4.73$) as most important. Additionally, the differences between knowledge and importance ranged from $-.54$ (Evidence-based Practices) to -1.54 (Recruitment and Retention of High-quality Teachers).

Table 1. Mean and standard deviations of perceived knowledge and importance of variables in reimagining teacher education in Kentucky.

Variable	Knowledge		Importance	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Evidence-Based Practice	3.89	.91	4.43	.77
High Leverage Practice	3.68	.98	4.44	.82
Fieldwork and Practice-based Clinical Experience	3.68	.93	4.65	.53
Culturally Responsive Teaching and Equity	3.43	.81	4.60	.61
Family Engagement	3.13	1.00	4.23	.72
District Partnerships with Teacher Preparation	3.72	.86	4.60	.58
Recruitment and Retention of High Quality Teachers	3.19	.88	4.73	.49
Accreditation and Program Improvement	3.23	.99	4.12	.94

Note. (5) Extremely; (4) very; (3) moderately; (2) slightly; (1) not at all

Figure 1. Mean scores of perceived knowledge and importance of variables in reimagining teacher education in Kentucky.



Participants were also asked open ended questions “Were you able to learn more about the topic(s) you selected?” and “Are there specific topics that were not addressed at this conference that you would like to see in the future?” Fifty-eight percent of the participants answered these open-ended questions. Their responses were analyzed through open coding with similar themes combined as appropriate. Themes that emerged were (a) knowledge and application of high leverage practices; (b) needs at a future KEEP conference; and, (c) need for greater participation of all IHEs. Participant comments highlighted the confusion regarding HLPs: “there are a variety of perspectives on what high leverage practices mean,” as well as indicating the need for more information on these practices and how to include them in coursework and clinical practice. The participants also thought there was a need for EPP workgroups to be established, both within the EPP and in collaboration with other EPPs. One participant commented, “we heard about these things, now we need to make a plan on where to start to do it.”

Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess Kentucky stakeholders’ knowledge and perception of importance in regard to variables associated with enhancing EPPs in the state of Kentucky. Results from the survey indicate stakeholders feel they are moderately knowledgeable of all the identified variables and feel each of the variables are very important to reimagining educator preparation in Kentucky. Although promising, this may suggest that stakeholder knowledge is not necessarily at the level needed to effectively disseminate this knowledge to preservice and in-service teachers. Specifically, if higher education faculty do not have the requisite knowledge needed, they may struggle with effectively translating this knowledge (e.g., evidence-based practices, HLPs) to their students. This provides the KEEP State Leadership Team and EPPs with a unique opportunity to provide professional development and support across EPPs and

LEAs to increase knowledge about these key variables to balance the perceived knowledge and importance.

A theme that emerged from the open-ended responses (i.e., common definitions of variables) poses a challenge to the work of the State Leadership Team as well as a limitation to this study. The survey asked participants their perceived knowledge of variables such as HLPs, but did not assess their actual knowledge of the variables. As one participant noted, “there are a variety of perspectives on what high leverage practices mean.” For this initiative to succeed, all involved will need to come to a consensus on a common definition of these variables. This becomes more of a challenge when trying to include both general education and special education due to each having its own list of HLPs. For example, general educators are guided by 19 HLPs to serve as the basic fundamentals of teaching in their setting (Ball & Forzani, 2011). Alternatively, the CEEDAR center in collaboration with the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC), developed a set of 22 HLPs for special educators and candidates (McLeskey et al., 2017). General Education and Special Education IHE faculty, in collaboration with their partner LEAs, will need to work together to “establish a common core of professional knowledge and skill that can be taught to aspiring teachers across all types of programs and pathways” (Ball & Forzani, 2011, p. 19).

Though this work is in its infancy, the excitement within Kentucky EPPs is evident. Participants’ open-ended responses indicated that they not only enjoyed the KEEP Summit but were also interested in how they could be involved. Building upon this interest, the KEEP State Leadership Team has identified several avenues to forward this work and increase EPPs and LEAs knowledge about the key variables within the KEEP State Leadership Team’s mission. With the support of the CEEDAR Center, five additional EPPs are joining the work by developing specific blueprints (a) Murray State University, (b) Western Kentucky University, (c) Campbellsville University, (d) Asbury University, and (e) Georgetown College. Additionally, existing statewide structures, such as the IHE Special Education Consortium and the Kentucky Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, are being leveraged to support the work through professional development (e.g., providing access to materials on HLPs) and establishing a research committee (K-KEEP) to provide a format for future professional development and research support. Lastly, a second KEEP Summit is being planned, with the focus on developing a common message regarding HLPs. As a component of that Summit, workgroups within and between EPPs will be established to align the work and increase participation. It is our hope that, with these efforts, teacher preparation across Kentucky will continue to progress toward excellence.

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