

Linking Teacher Quality and Preparation

Mary T. Brownell

Center on Personnel Studies in
Special Education

Demands of Current Policy Context

- Strong emphasis on teacher quality and questions about the ability of Colleges of Education to prepare high quality teachers has put incredible pressure on teacher educators to establish credible linkages between teacher education, the quality of TE graduates, and the achievement of students taught by TE graduates.

Considerations in Making Such Linkages

- Essential to establishing linkages between teacher education, teacher quality, and student achievement are valid and reliable dependent measures
 - Dimensions of special education teacher quality are not well-conceptualized and potentially vary considerably
 - Valid assessments of those dimensions are not available
 - Student assessment is inadequate for comparison across groups of student with disabilities and most standardized, group administered tests are insufficiently sensitive to gauge gains

Considerations in Making Such Linkages

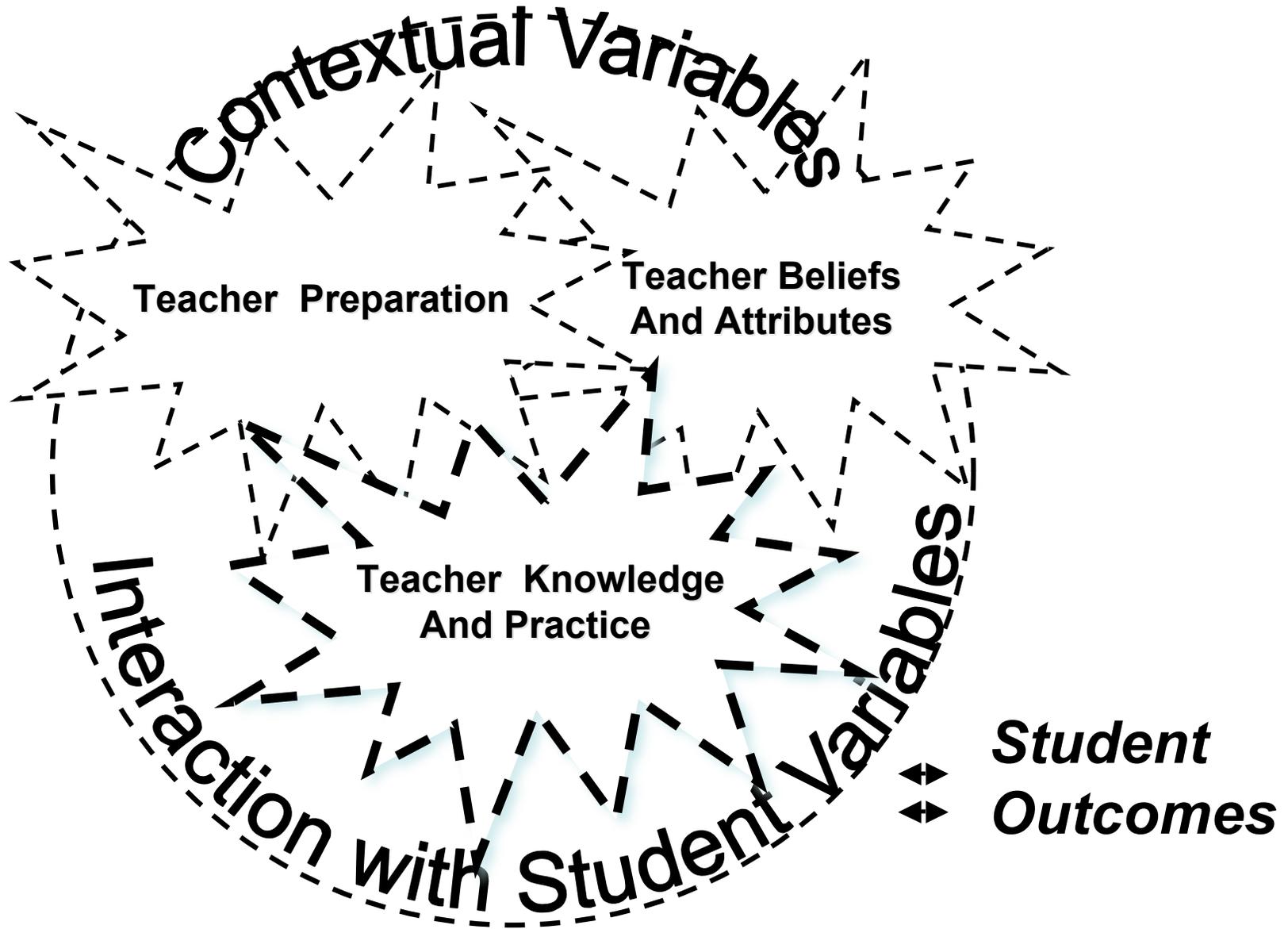
- Program variability is enormous, making it more difficult to link program elements with specific changes in dimensions of teacher quality
- Special education teachers work in such varied contexts requiring specific knowledge, making comparisons across these contexts challenging
- Students with disabilities are served by multiple professionals, making it difficult to link their achievement with the special education teacher

Our First Attempt

- Focused mostly on understanding some key dimensions of teacher quality, for both beginners and experienced teachers, and to a lesser degree, the contextual factors that seem to support quality

What did we do?

- Quantitative studies of 30 beginning teachers and 60 of varied experience (Colorado, Florida, California)
- In-depth, qualitative studies of selected beginning and experienced teachers involving both interviews and observations



Quantitative Findings

- Beginning special education teachers demonstrated average generic practice; whereas, demonstrated reading practice was somewhat below average.
- Overall classroom practice correlated with student gains in oral fluency
- Overall classroom practice correlated with knowledge of word attack

Qualitative Findings

- Most highly engaging teachers differed from moderate to low engaging teachers on:
 - Instructional quality, including structure and coherence of reading lessons as well as strategies for engaging students in reading
 - Responsiveness to student needs, both academic and behavioral
 - Socio-emotional climate of classroom
 - Strategies for fostering student autonomy

Qualitative Findings

- Knowledge of special education and knowledge of reading pedagogy are both important, and most beginners feel unprepared to teach reading
- Opportunities to apply and practice teacher education content influences sense of efficacy and classroom practice
- Preparation in classroom management influences a beginners' ability to deliver instruction

Qualitative Findings

- Access to curriculum and relevant training influences instruction
- Service delivery model influences ability to provide instruction
- General administrative and collegial support plays a necessary, but not sufficient role in supporting beginners

Conclusions

- Quality of the special education teachers' reading instruction matters in securing student achievement gains, particularly at the basic skill level
- Knowledge of how to teach reading (word attack) relates to quality of instructional practice
- Beginning teachers demonstrated a need to strengthen reading instruction

Conclusions

- The nature of preparation in reading seems to matter
 - good experience is necessary
- Need to better understand the role of curriculum in supporting beginning teacher practice
- Uneven practice of beginners suggests a strong need for coherence between preparation and induction

Questions to Consider

- Given the dramatic shortages of special education teachers, and our subsequent need to prepare teachers broadly, how can we help special education teachers develop the sophisticated knowledge they need to teach reading well?
 - Or, the sophisticated knowledge they are likely to need to teach other subject areas well?