

Course Info:

SPECED 466: Working with Families of Exceptional Students and Community Agencies

# Building Complexity in Conceptualizations of Family and Community: Fostering Inclusivity and Equity in Family-School Partnerships

Courtney L. Wilt, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
Inclusive Education

## Purpose

The purpose of this course redesign proposed is two-fold:

1. To **interrogate course materials and examples as they represent families of children with disabilities** (e.g., families and communities representing diversity in race, class, disability, sexuality, language, ethnicity, migration status).
2. In doing so, **foster inclusivity by affirming students' own identities and family structures.**

Through these coordinated aims towards equity, student motivation and course rigor will be enhanced organically and through multidimensional learning that involves and propels their existing knowledges.

Students in this course are not necessarily special education majors. They graduate into a multitude of education positions across settings with direct access, power, and responsibility for how students and families experience schooling.

## Contextualizing the Problem

This redesign goes beyond current expectations to engage pre-service educators in **supported dialogue** and **content** that addresses intersectional complexities of working with families of exceptional students.

For example:

- For Black families, involvement in their child's education can be ignored, unrecognized, and misunderstood by school personnel (Reynolds et al., 2015). This is due in part to prevailing frameworks of parent involvement with schooling not accounting for the **nuanced and deliberate actions of Black families in supporting their children's education** (McWayne et al., 2017).
- That is, prevailing framings position Black students in ableist ways by assuming they are less smart (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011) and in need of discipline (Losen et al., 2015; Annamma, 2018) by racialized educational systems. Black families too often interact with predominantly White school personnel who presume they are unable to contribute to their child's education (Hines et al., 2021).

## Redesign Efforts

This redesign involves:

- **Reviewing cultural examples and representations of families.** Currently, "traditional" families (heteronormative, white, abled, married, middle class) dominate the textbook's examples—and family voices in the field generally. Yet these characteristics combined are not the typical experience, nor are they "better" than other family arrangements.
- **Identifying areas for deeper intersectional understandings:**
  - For example, current coursework describes foster care, yet stops short of reflecting on national and state-level racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes experienced by children/youth in those systems.

- Infusing equity into the syllabus/course materials is to affirm and value *student* diversity while exploring social forces and identity markers that they may also be/have been underexposed to.
- Ultimately, centering myths surrounding "good" and "normal" families not only reinforces bias against families who deviate from these traditional norms, but these norms often do not represent UWW students' own experiences and families.

## Multi-Modal Readings and Activities

- Blog posts
- Podcasts
- Book chapters
- Social media on disability justice
- Intersectionally Conscious Collaboration Protocol (Boveda & Weinberg, 2022)
- FlipGrid Discussions

### Example 1: Centering Families and Students Experiencing Multiple Barriers to Equity in Special Education

#### Two Black Parents Walk Into a Meeting: On Race, Education, and Our Son's IEP

I'm not just advocating for a child whose challenges don't follow a script. I'm also a black mother advocating for my black son in a room full of people who don't look like us.

*This is What Genes Can't Tell Us, a monthly column by Taylor Harris on parenting, genetics, and the quest for answers to medical riddles.*

**Why Autistic People Are Using #ActuallyAutistic on Social Media**  
It's a paradigm shift in the autism rights movement, dominated for so long by the parents of autistic children, leaving actually autistic people feeling unheard.

**#ACTUALLY AUTISTIC**  
-AthalyAltay

### Example 2: Centering Immigrant Mothers

(M)othering Labeled Children  
Bilingualism and Disability in the Lives of Latinx Mothers



Dr. Maria Cioè-Peña

### Example 3: Centering Indigenous Families

Setting the Record Straight: The Indian Child Welfare Act  
Fact Sheet  
September 2016

#### 'This Land' Is a Gripping Podcast on Native Land Rights

"This Land" tells the story of an intriguing case with big stakes for tribal sovereignty

THIS LAND

Rebecca Nagle

## CONTACT

Courtney L. Wilt  
Email: wiltc@uww.edu

