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ABSTRACT

A consortium of universities in Utah developed a teacher training program in sensory impairments to address a long-term critical shortage of teachers qualified to service hearing-impaired/deaf and visually-impaired/blind students. The teacher shortage was a direct result of program cuts at the University of Utah. An advisory board was selected to represent the various factions that were impacted by or could impact the teacher shortage and the training model. The involvement of the three major teacher training institutions in the state enables students in rural areas to participate while remaining in their communities. Teacher trainees take a portion of their required courses through the regular university program at their home university. Specialized courses in hearing impairments or visual impairments are taught in only one location, but delivered to remote regions of the state through video technology, including interactive television. Students accomplish practica through traditional student teaching experiences; where possible, summer student teaching at the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind; or through supervision by teachers already employed as teachers of sensory-impaired students. In the 4 years of the project, 59 teachers have completed training. Over 2,000 Utah public school students with sensory impairments now have an appropriate teacher-training support system. (KS)

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MULTI-UNIVERSITY CONSORTIUM FOR TEACHER TRAINING: A MODEL FOR PRE-SERVICE TRAINING IN RURAL AREAS

By definition a consortium is an agreement between institutions and organizations to combine resources in order to accomplish a common end which individual organizations could not accomplish on their own. By combining financial and personnel resources larger programs become possible and are enhanced by the contributions of a greater perspective. This presentation provides an example of a program which was developed with such a consortium approach.

HISTORY

Utah faced long-term critical shortages in the numbers of teachers qualified to serve hearing impaired/deaf and visually impaired/blind students. The situation was compounded by problems with recruitment as well as retention. Four concerns were the impetus for concern: (1) enrollment growth was predicted to continue for many years; (2) the number of certified teachers in hearing impairments and visual impairments was declining; (3) teacher turnover was high and increasing; and, (4) no state approved preservice program existed for training teachers in hearing impairments or visual impairments on a state-wide basis.

Most of the 40 school districts in Utah are in rural areas and have difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. Most of the districts have difficulty recruiting even when advertising nationally and in retaining trained staff for any length of time. Consequently, it was becoming increasingly common for teachers who were not certified in either hearing impairments or visual impairments and who had very limited background and training in this area to work with this population of students. This practice was even more problematic in light of the fact that in order for these students to receive an appropriate education, a higher level of teacher knowledge and skill is required than for most areas of education. This became even more apparent through a teacher needs survey disseminated throughout the state. Over 50% of the teachers of student with hearing impairments and over 75% of the teachers of students with visual impairments reported that their students were multiply disabled. These disabilities included cerebral palsy, intellectual handicaps, orthopedic handicaps, autism, behavior disorders, medical fragility, learning disabilities, and other sensory impairments (deaf/blind).

The existence of this teacher shortage was a direct result of program cuts on the part of one of the major universities in the state. The role assignment to

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prepare teachers in hearing impairments was granted to the University of Utah by the State Board of Regents in the mid 60's and to prepare teachers in visual impairments in the early 80's. The program in hearing impairments was the major source of teachers of hearing impaired students in Utah and was the only teacher preparation program of its kind in the state and much of the mountain states region. This certification program met State Board of Education Standards as well as national accreditation standards. The program in visual impairments was implemented on a summer, work-shop basis through the cooperation of numerous agencies. Funding for both programs disappeared in 1986. State budget cuts (the University of Utah's share was \$5.5 million) had major impact on the education of students with sensory impairments.

There was clearly a critical need for a model preservice program for training teachers of students with sensory impairments in Utah. Based on past experience, it was also clear that any model program would need to be cost effective and efficient. It would also need to be implemented in such a manner that it would prepare teachers in urban as well as rural districts.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

FUNDING

The first step was to contact individuals and agencies who were directly impacted by this teacher shortage including parents, the State Office of Education, representatives from local school districts - rural and urban, and the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind. Through a series of initial meetings with a loosely organized representative group, it was determined that initial development funding was required. The initial project was established through the Utah State Office of Education, At Risk Division, and funded through a combination of federal, state, and private foundation grants.

STRUCTURE

Two important decisions were made from the on-set of this project. First that the umbrella term of Sensory Impairments would encompass both hearing impairments and visual impairments. Even though the training curriculum would be distinct in each area, a primary concern was to keep administrative costs to a minimum. Combining these two areas into one also enabled a larger population of teacher trainees to be identified with a single program.

Second, an advisory board carefully selected to represent the various factions which were impacted by or could impact this training model was vital to its structure and continuation. The advisory board consisted of university department chairs from each of the participating universities; parents of children with hearing impairments and parents of children with visual impairments; adults who were visually impaired or hearing impaired; special education program coordinators from both rural and urban districts; specialists from the State Office of Education, At Risk Division; coordinators for urban and rural programs, and the assistant superintendent from the Utah Schools for the

Deaf and the Blind; representatives from the Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities; and an assistant commissioner from the Utah System of Higher Education.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Involvement of the three major teacher training institutions in the state was vital to recruitment of students statewide. This also enabled students in rural areas to participate while remaining in their communities. The Special Education Departments in each of these universities agreed to cooperate in program requirements as follows:

Admission Requirements:

Teacher trainees would select one of the three participating universities as their home university. They would meet university and department admissions requirements and apply for admission before the end of their second quarter/semester.

Course Work Requirements:

Teacher trainees would take a portion of their required courses through the regular university program at their home university, i.e. core special education requirements, and requirements in communication disorders (for those certifying in hearing impairments.)

Specialized Courses in Hearing Impairments or Visual Impairments:

Teacher trainees would register through the continuing education/extension program through the participating universities. These courses would be contracted through the extension programs each quarter/semester. These courses would be taught in only one location in classroom space made available by the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind in their administration offices in Salt Lake; Brigham Young University, Salt Lake Center for Continuing Education; and the State Office of Education, Division for Services for Visually Handicapped.

Since all courses were upper division (graduate level), students could apply these courses toward completion of a Master's degree in conjunction with their certification program.

RURAL (DISTANCE) EDUCATION

Course Delivery:

Through this program, course work is delivered to more remote regions of the state through the use of video technology including interactive television. Teaching faculty are responsible for grading all assignments, writing support materials, and providing on-going feedback through weekly telephone conferences, interactive television conferences, and when necessary, on-site visits to provide direct support. Teacher trainees are thus able to remain in their own communities while completing the major portion of the teacher

training program. Where appropriately certified and qualified teachers are already present in a rural community, students are also supported by adjunct faculty on-site who facilitate course delivery and assist with supervision of practica. This rarely is the case. Very few teachers certified in either hearing impairments or visual impairments are located in rural areas. It is anticipated that as more students become certified, on-site facilitators will become more available.

Practicum:

Practica are accomplished in several ways. In some locations, sufficient sites exist to enable a traditional student teaching experience in addition to opportunities for on-going experiences under the supervision of a certified, experienced teacher. These locations are few. Presently, most rural training sites have no trained teachers in hearing impairments or visual impairments and the teacher in training is teaching on temporary authorization. Since many of the larger, urban districts and the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind hold school all year, rural students are able to participate in a traditional student teaching experience during the summer months for at least a portion of this requirement. These students find living accommodations through several sources including the residential cottages of the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, relatives, friends, and university dormitories. Since many of the teachers in training are also employed as teachers of students with sensory impairments, practicum supervisors travel to these regions to model good teaching practice and evaluate teaching performance while the teachers in training are working with their own students.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

*** Over 2,000 Utah public school students with sensory impairments, for the first time, have an appropriate teacher training support system.**

***Fifty nine teachers have completed this training in the four years of this project. Half of these teachers are located in rural regions throughout the state.**

***Program participation is shared by all cooperating institutions.**

***Trainees typically also pursue Master's degrees in Special Education.**

***Program delivery is efficient and effective. Nineteen adjunct faculty (2 of whom also serve as practicum coordinators) teach 23 courses each year. The curriculum meets requirements established by the State Board of Education in Hearing Impairments and Visual Impairments and is consistent with best practice and accepted professional standards. There is a project director who in addition to administrative and advising responsibilities, teaches courses and assists with supervision of practica. The project also employs a part time secretary.**

CONCLUSION

There are several things that have become apparent during the development and implementation of this program model. The consortium approach provides an opportunity to pool community resources and perspectives. In addition to providing different organizational perspectives and contributing to cost effectiveness, diversity of the teaching staff allows students to be exposed to a wide diversity of ideas and methodologies.

Acceptance of model programs are dependent on the perspective of the community which they purport to serve that the program meets a real need. Participation of that community in the development and ongoing evaluation of the program allows for community ownership and involvement. These ingredients are vital to continuation and support.

As of this writing, the program described above is in the process of seeking ongoing funding support. Presently a Legislative Bill has been introduced in the Utah House of Representatives. It includes an appropriation from the General Fund for fiscal year 1994-95 to the State Board of Regents to fund the Multi-University Consortium for Teacher Training in Sensory Impairments. Ongoing continuation will then be sought through a line item appropriation in the State Board of Regents budget recommendation. If we are successful in this attempt, it will to a large extent reflect the strength of a consortium model.