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ABSTRACT

The Collaborative, Site-Based Teacher Preparation Program in Early Childhood has transformed the way that the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Professional Program in Education conducts early childhood teacher preparation. Preservice teachers now engage in performance-based learning in collaboratively supported, community- and public school-based early childhood settings where they learn to work with culturally, linguistically, and ability-diverse young children and their families. Course content is taught on-site or delivered through online core modules, and competency acquisition is supported by field-based faculty mentors who work closely with students and cooperating teachers. Seminars give students an opportunity to join together to critically reflect on their experiences and solve problems. Performance-based assessment tools are being developed to measure preservice teacher outcomes. Project outcomes being looked at include: (1) improved preservice student learning and teaching, (2) teachers who are prepared to work with diverse populations, (3) strengthened linkages and improved continuity between child care facilities and public schools, and (4) a teacher preparation model that can be applied at all levels of teacher education. (Contains 30 references.) (Author/HTH)

Collaborative, Site-Based Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Program

Patricia E. Ragan

Abstract

The Collaborative, Site-Based Teacher Preparation Program in Early Childhood has transformed the way that the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Professional Program in Education conducts early childhood teacher preparation. Preservice teachers now engage in performance-based learning in collaboratively supported, community- and public school-based early childhood settings where they learn to work with culturally, linguistically, and ability-diverse young children and their families. Course content is taught on-site or delivered through online core modules, and competency acquisition is supported by field-based faculty mentors who work closely with students and cooperating teachers. Seminars give students an opportunity to join together to critically reflect on their experiences and solve problems. Performance-based assessment tools are being developed to measure preservice teacher outcomes. Project outcomes being looked at include: (1) improved preservice student learning and teaching, (2) teachers who are prepared to work with diverse populations, (3) strengthened linkages and improved continuity between child care facilities and public schools, and (4) a teacher preparation model that can be applied at all levels of teacher education.

National standards of academic excellence have been developed as part of President Clinton's 10-point call to action (1997), and every state and every school must establish meaningful standards for what students should master in core subject areas. Many states have completed model academic standards that will serve as rigorous goals for what students should know and be able to do by given times in their education in order to achieve at high levels and be able to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Operating concurrently, many states have also restructured teacher licensing requirements, moving toward broad, competency-based certification categories that include early childhood and away from a "course-for-credit" structure.

Teacher preparation programs, however, are still based predominantly on this traditional course-for-credit model. U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley reported that an incoherent and complicated structure exists for teacher preparation with lax or weakly enforced requirements for entry (Office of Postsecondary Education, 1999). In addition, the vast majority of current teacher preparation models do not take place in environments in which students learn to relate to children and families whose background is different from their own, therefore failing to provide them with the experiences needed to accurately transmit knowledge of other cultures, to develop significant cross-cultural experiences for children, or to reflect thoughtfully on their personal biases and beliefs.

National statistics indicate that families have become increasingly diverse in form, ability, race and ethnicity, culture, and linguistic background. Implementation of the 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) will see more young children with disabilities included in regular classrooms, as well as statewide assessment programs. Minority youth are the fastest growing segment of the child population, are over-represented among children under 6 living in poverty, and are expected to increase to 38% of children living in poverty by 2010 ("Focus on Teacher Preparation," 1999). The number of children of immigrants alone is expected to rise to 9 million in 2010, representing 22% of the school-age population (Fix & Passel, 1993).

To further compound the issue, most child development research is with white middle-class children, causing teachers frequently to confuse

cultural differences with developmental deficits or cultural deprivation. Teachers enter classrooms unprepared to implement a standards-based curriculum that will meet the learning needs of pluralistic student populations in developmentally appropriate ways.

In contrast, "President Clinton's Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century" (1997) calls on institutions of higher learning to "re-invent teacher preparation." According to Goals 2000, preservice teachers need hands-on training in problem solving, collaborative teaching, and competency-based performance and assessment strategies to support district educational reform goals and raise student achievement. The Children's Defense Fund (1999) reports that to meet the National Education Goals, teacher training must be upgraded in quality to meet the educational needs of *all* students.

The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Professional Program in Education has been moving toward a teacher preparation model built on collaborative relationships with local school districts to share and combine the experiences of preservice students and seasoned practitioners, and to provide earlier, more extensive, and more relevant field experiences for students in preparation. One of the first initiatives to emerge involves the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, the Green Bay PK-12 School District, the Green Bay School's Head Start Program, and the Fort Howard/Jefferson Family Resource Center, who are committed to working together to develop and implement an exemplary early childhood teacher preparation program.

Statement of the Problem

The 1995 National Education Goals Report, measuring progress toward the National Education Goals through year 2000, focuses on the need to develop family-school-community partnerships to increase family involvement, provide greater continuity between the early childhood and elementary school years, and to ensure that by "the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (Goal 1: Ready to Learn). A national survey of kindergarten teachers additionally reports that there is little contact between schools and the providers of pre-kindergarten care and educational services. In response, "President Clinton's Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century" (1997) has asked for continued expansion of Head Start, family resource, and early childhood programs for disadvantaged children and families and strong community commitments to enhance parental involvement in the early years.

The federal initiative to reform welfare, however, has brought about changing patterns of work that affect families' needs for child care and support. The implementation of Wisconsin's new welfare plan, for example, requires parents to work when their youngest child is 12 weeks old, creates a new category of largely unregulated child care, and reduces the number of young children who can be served in local Head Start, English as a Second Language (ESL), and Title I public half-day preschool programs. In response, full-day programming has become the priority model for federal Head Start funding (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1993), further reducing the number of children receiving services. As a result, 60% of kindergartners in the United States now attend school all day (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2000).

In addition, *Working Woman's* fifth annual study of child care nationwide (1997) reported that there is not enough child care available, and, although Wisconsin ranked in the top 10, no state received the highest rating in any of the categories of commitment, quality, safety, and availability. Low wages for early childhood providers lead to high turnover, making it difficult to attract and retain the well-trained and educated staff that provide a base for high-quality programming. Early childhood education is becoming a top federal and state priority.

Federal, state, and local governments are committing significant funding to improve the quality as well as the quantity of early childhood professionals. Lead teachers in Head Start classrooms are now required to have a minimum of an associate's degree by 2004 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1993), and several states have state-funded scholarship initiatives to support early childhood professional development (e.g., Child Care Scholarship and Bonus

Program under T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood WISCONSIN and North Carolina T.E.A.C.H.). Lawmakers are responding by reviewing the current state of preschool programs and considering legislation to implement programs in public schools for 3- and 4-year-olds, and state licensing agencies are beginning to incorporate early childhood education within broad "generalist" teaching categories and levels.

Early childhood education is a rapidly growing occupational category. In Wisconsin alone, it is reported to be the third fastest growing category between 1997 and 2005. Teacher preparation programs are being pressured to expand the early childhood component of their programs or integrate early childhood competencies across the new teaching categories. The challenge for the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay partnership became twofold: (1) to proactively meet the growing demand for high-quality early childhood teachers in the region, and (2) to "reinvent" early childhood teacher preparation to align standards-based teaching with developmentally appropriate teaching and learning.

The Model

With the help of a three-year Fund to Improve Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) grant and an advisory board composed of representatives from the partnership, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay set out to develop an innovative, interdisciplinary teacher training model that would prepare preservice teachers to work with culturally, linguistically, and ability-diverse young children and their families, and to provide this training within trusted community settings.

In collaboration with their partners, a series of clinical rotations was developed that provide early childhood preservice teachers with a rich and varied sequence of experiences through which they have multiple opportunities to demonstrate competencies working directly with young children and families from diverse backgrounds. Rotations now include infant/toddler sites, nonprofit child care centers, inclusive child care programs, public and private preschools, Head Start classrooms, and full-day kindergartens. These experiences engage preservice teachers in hands-on professional practice in a workplace environment with opportunities to learn developmentally appropriate practice, engage parents, and learn to respond to the educational needs of limited English proficient, economically disadvantaged, or ability-diverse young children.

Throughout the program, identified competencies are provided through "core" offerings delivered utilizing online technology (WebCT). Seminars at the university give preservice teachers an opportunity to critically reflect on their experiences and discuss issues of concern.

Throughout these planned and sequenced field experiences, competency acquisition is supported by field-based mentoring from a faculty who works closely with students and cooperating teachers. The faculty mentor functions as a coach for preservice students working in pre-kindergarten classrooms, modeling best practice and providing students with ongoing feedback and support. A panel of experts from the region spent a full day generating the duties and tasks that a mentor in early childhood needs to know and be able to do. With no existing models to draw on, the members of the panel generated a virtual analysis of the occupation of "mentor" at the university level. Following verification by an additional 80 professionals from across the state, a detailed job description was developed for the position. The position is being carefully monitored to help define essential tasks in detail, determine if the identified tasks meet the needs of the students on-site, and document the critical role this position plays in the program design.

The faculty mentor and cooperating teachers meet on a weekly basis to reflect and discuss preservice teacher progress; identify knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to improve performance; review and update an Individual Learning Plan (ILP); and select new competencies to be addressed and activities that will be used to demonstrate mastery. Within this context, learning and assessment remain inseparable. As students identify problems and develop competencies to solve problems in the classroom, they assess and describe their own progress and use mentor/cooperating teacher feedback to validate self-performance. Students receive summative evaluations upon completion of each

semester and a final formative evaluation at the end of the program. These evaluations are included in their exit portfolio.

Content

A standards-based curriculum, with clearly defined competencies identifying what students should know and be able to do, needed to be designed to ensure preservice teacher proficiency in all applicable standards and content knowledge. The first task was to identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that early childhood practitioners should possess so that early childhood course content and class contact hours could be converted into clearly defined competencies. The development of these competencies was guided by the results of a Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) process, in which 14 "experts" in early childhood education representing 300 years of experience spent 2 days under the guidance of a trained facilitator, identifying what students should know and be able to do when they graduate from a 4-year program in early childhood education. Verification was conducted through a statewide survey of 80 additional early childhood professionals. The competencies were then linked to and cross-referenced with the high standards developed by the National Association for the Education for Young Children (NAEYC) and endorsed by the Association of Teacher Education (ATE) and the Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Early Childhood (DEC/CEC), framed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Standards for Teacher Development and Licensing and performance-based licensure standards, and adapted to respond to the diverse and changing needs of the young children and their families in the Green Bay community.

The eight-course, 22-credit early childhood program sequence was then converted into competency-based outcomes and transformed into online "core" offerings. Students now access core content online while spending 4 to 6 hours a week in a variety of rotating clinical placements.

Core Offerings

Core 1: The History, Philosophy, and Current Programs in Early Childhood (3 credits). This course is computer enhanced. Students attend traditional classroom lectures used in combination with interactive and participatory group discussions and projects in class and online. Eight site visits to community-based early childhood program models are required, and students identify, critique, and evaluate each model. Additionally, students reflect on current issues in the light of historical trends and serve as advocates for change.

Core 2: Observation and Assessment of Young Children (4 credits). Students access content online and spend 4 hours a week in the following rotating clinical placements: an infant/toddler site, a community-based child care center, and a kindergarten classroom. Students observe or assist at developmental assessments and interventions, complete course projects on-site, and return to campus 6 times during the semester to hear presentations, work on computer skills, and reflect on their experiences.

Core 3: Working and Communicating with Families of Young Children (3 credits). This 3-credit core exposes students to the contextual knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary to be successful in a variety of diverse settings working directly with young children and families (e.g., the Multicultural Center of Greater Green Bay, the Fort Howard/ Jefferson and the Howe Family Resource Centers, the UW-Green Bay Multicultural Center, the Coalition to Promote Respect). This experiential core was designed so students become involved in school and community programs where they (1) learn and apply the knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary to work collaboratively with families from diverse backgrounds; (2) develop an understanding of and respect for the values and beliefs of families and children who are linguistically, ability, and culturally diverse; (3) learn the skills needed to communicate effectively with these diverse populations; and (4) provide service to families.

Core 4: Curriculum in Early Childhood/Kindergarten. Two 3-credit courses (Curriculum and Program Development in Early Childhood and Teaching Kindergarten: Integrated Curriculum) were combined into this 6-credit curriculum core. The core competencies and performance-based projects were developed and put online by a team of early childhood professionals from the field working collaboratively

with university faculty. Students complete two 7-week placements (preschool program, kindergarten classroom), spending 4 hours a week in preassigned classrooms. Students access content online and attend 9 campus-based seminars throughout the semester.

Core 5: Student Teaching. Students complete 4½ weeks in an early childhood classroom, 9 weeks in a full-day kindergarten, and 9 weeks in a grade 1-6 classroom.

The model was to have been implemented with an initial cohort of 16 students in a series of stages over the course of 3 semesters and 2 summers. The first "cohort" admitted to Core 1, however, consisted of 32 students, double the usual enrollment. Growing enrollments may reflect national and state attention to the importance of the early years, as well as interest in a model that responds to the needs of the traditional and nontraditional student.

Evaluation

A plan is developed for each preservice student, identifying individual competencies needed to meet student learner outcomes and the performance-based activities that they will use to demonstrate attainment of those outcomes. The plan is developed in collaboration with a university advisor and reflects the needs, goals, and objectives of the program.

A variety of ongoing performance-based assessment tools and techniques are used to measure student learning outcomes as they are reflected in increased student knowledge and relevant changes in performance. Assessments may include but may not be limited to observational studies, logs or journals, interviews, lesson plans, case studies, role playing/ interactive sessions, analyses of teaching situations, teaching vignettes requiring decision making, and videotapes of instructional delivery. Students compile a collection of work samples for inclusion in a culminating portfolio that captures the evolution of the student's ideas and learning and that are used as progress markers for evaluation.

Ongoing monitoring of program effectiveness and student learning is being done through a variety of assessment instruments. Faculty who are teaching content online are asked to document the variety of technological components and strategies used in each core, as well as data on flexibility in the use of the medium to enhance learning. Pre- and post-survey data on technology knowledge, skills, and attitudes have been administered in all core offerings. In each core, students are asked to reflect on how comfortable they are with the online format and how well it works for them in delivering program content. Students are then divided into small groups and asked to identify obstacles that stand in the way of resolving each concern, and to generate student and instructor goals that could minimize or eliminate each concern. At the end of each core, the final evaluation asks each student to evaluate how well these issues and concerns were addressed or resolved. These data are now being entered and analyzed.

Empirical Support for the Model

The design for the Collaborative Site-Based Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Model reflects the results of the empirical research presented in the full report of the American Council on Education Presidents' Task Force on Teacher Education (1999). It shares several characteristics that have been identified in this research in strong teacher education programs: (1) a shared vision of teaching excellence defined within strong relationships with pre-kindergarten through grade-12 schools and community leaders, (2) well-defined standards for practice and performance, (3) a rigorous standards-based core curriculum, (4) the infusion of technology into the curriculum, and (5) an inquiry- and performance-based environment.

Recent school reform initiatives (e.g., Coalition of Essential Schools—Sizer, 1993; Wasley, 1991) support implementation of innovative instruction characterized by higher-order thinking, problem solving, and decision making in which students use scientific methods to explore topics and "construct" new understandings of the material. Typically described as "constructivist" in the reform literature, these recommendations mirror early childhood best practice (Baker, 1993). Advances in the study of the brain, cognition, and development offer new understandings of human learning and now support these "constructivist" approaches to effective classroom practice

(Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Resnick & Klopfer, 1989).

Early experiences have now been shown to be critical to later learning (Greenough, Black, & Wallace, 1987; Dawson & Fischer, 1994; Shore, 1997), and recent research suggests that even very young infants possess sophisticated cognitive schemas to explain and organize phenomena around them and begin the development of concepts (Lamb & Sherrod, 1981; Mehler & Fox, 1985). The development of intellectual competence is more than the accumulation of discrete pieces of information. Pedagogical approaches need to integrate three critical elements of deep understanding: (1) factual grounding that is accurate and based on students' prior learning to promote the development of concepts (Mestre, 1994); (2) awareness of the structure of knowledge in a discipline to enhance problem solving through the identification of patterns and principles (Larkin, 1983); and (3) metacognitive or self-monitoring activities to gain insight into and regulate their own thinking and learning processes (Carey, 1996). Learners also need to have opportunities to apply and generalize experiences if they are to make use of what they have learned (Klahr & Carver, 1988) and apply that knowledge appropriately and adaptively (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Ericsson & Charness, 1994).

Additionally, the research on the social context of learning (Egan, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978) supports cognition being a social process. The environment needs to support learning by providing a framework of meaningfulness—culture, people, tools, language, symbols—that "encourage connections between learning and one's personal history" (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). Another theme of cognition as a social process talks of distributed cognition, with research supporting quicker and more effective solutions being reached through collaborative and collegial interaction and modes of inquiry (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Brown & Campione,1994).

The Collaborative Site-Based Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Model operates from within an established university-community partnership whose educational reforms are clearly helping to bridge the gap between research, practice, and policy through the implementation of learning environments that will improve teacher performance and student learning.

Significance

The project represents an important departure from existing practice. The Collaborative Site-Based Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Model responds to the nationwide call for teacher preparation reform by developing and implementing a unique competency-based and technologically relevant model that provides early childhood preservice teachers access to coherent, on-site training from professionals who are integrally connected to the program, the world of work, and the families of the children being served, while continuing to link to the resources of the university. The model is preparing teachers who are committed to and capable of supporting children's learning as it develops over time within real classroom settings, with support in the field, and with opportunities to observe, plan, and apply standards-based curriculum.

The project prepares teachers who are capable of supporting children's learning within the context of diverse family backgrounds. The model prepares preservice teachers for licensure with demonstrated competencies in meeting the needs of young children with diverse abilities and multicultural/ESL backgrounds. Those competencies are learned and assessed within trusted community-based settings where preservice teachers will work with and relate to children and adults from diverse backgrounds and will graduate highly qualified professionals prepared to meet the learning needs of pluralistic student populations.

The project involves learner-centered improvements. The standards-based design of the program reflects its focus on the learner by defining what early childhood preservice teachers will know and be able to do upon successful completion of the program. In addition, it allows for flexibility so that the program sequence can be adapted to match each learner's unique competency needs, supporting the entry of nontraditional students through multiple venues.

The model sustains commitment and enhances learning through extensive feedback and support from peers and professionals through cohort grouping, Individual Learning Plans (ILP), weekly team meetings, on-site faculty mentoring, and reflective seminars. Peer collaboration has been identified as

essential to teachers' continued learning (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Team teaching, mentoring, and formally planned meetings allow for reflection, a productive exchange of ideas, and the development of collegial relationships. Creating learning communities within schools improves preservice student learning and teaching.

The project serves as a teacher preparation model that can be applied at all levels of teacher education. The proposed project has strong potential as a state and national model for preparing teachers at all grade levels to work in urban and rural districts with diverse family patterns, as well as responding to the need to enhance and connect teacher education programs to the wider educational community in ways that are sustainable and cost effective. Its standards-based structure additionally responds to the national call for performance-based licensing requirements.

The project will support a potential articulated professional development continuum with the Wisconsin technical college system. Future efforts will be made to link the online early childhood education sequence to the UW-Green Bay Extended Degree Distance Learning Program to make alternative certification available to child care providers who wish to earn a bachelor's degree through the new $60 million Child Care Scholarship and Bonus Program under T.E.A.C.H Early Childhood WISCONSIN. It will also begin the process of developing an articulated professional development sequence with the Wisconsin Technical System for early childhood professionals that is competency based, allowing interested students, traditional and nontraditional, to be admitted to the program through the Competency-Based Admissions Policy being developed by the UW system.

This project is cost-effective. In a time of shrinking resources, the project provides the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay an opportunity to create a shared agenda for and with students, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers in the community that innovatively and effectively addresses the rapidly changing needs of its families and young children.

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