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## ABSTRACT

This final report describes activities and accomplishments of a 5-year project at the University of San Francisco (California) to recruit and train minority and bilingual paraeducators (instructional assistants and teacher aides) and noncertified substitute teachers to receive a special education (mild-moderate) credential and master's degree with an emphasis in urban, multicultural special education. The 2-year internship program used field-based training, instruction by urban education specialists, an integrated curriculum, intensive collaboration with local school districts, case-based instruction, continuous supervision, and authentic assessment of outcomes. Training emphasized direct application of theory into practice. The project's achieved objectives were: (1) recruitment of 40 paraeducators and substitutes from diverse and underrepresented groups; (2) provision of financial assistance for project candidates; (3) implementation of an urban, multicultural special education emphasis in training credential candidates; and (4) information dissemination about an alternative paraeducator-to-teacher model for preparing special educators to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children with disabilities. (DB)

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**Alternative Routes to Teaching (ART): Qualifying Minority and  
Bilingual Paraeducators and Noncertified Substitutes for Urban,  
Multicultural Special Education Classrooms  
Final Report  
Grant # H029E970024**

**Project Director  
Susan Evans**

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**Abstract: H029E970024**

**Alternative Routes to Teaching (ART): Qualifying Minority and Bilingual Paraeducators and Noncertified Substitutes for Urban, Multicultural Special Education Classrooms**

There is a chronic shortage in this region of credentialed special education teachers to work in central city schools with culturally diverse mild-moderately children with disabilities. Project ART was implemented to recruit and train minority and bilingual paraeducators (instructional assistants and teacher aides) and noncertified substitutes to receive a special education (mild-moderate) credential and master's degree with an emphasis in urban, multicultural special education. This field-based internship project offered an alternative route to teacher certification for paraeducators and substitutes already working in central city classrooms. Project ART addressed four major objectives:

- 1) Recruit 40 paraeducators and substitutes from diverse and underrepresented groups;
- 2) Provide financial assistance for project candidates;
- 3) Implement an urban, multicultural special education emphasis in training credential candidates;
- 4) Disseminate information about an alternative para-to-teacher model for preparing special educators to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children with disabilities.

Using field based training, instruction provided by urban education specialists, an integrated curriculum, intensive collaboration with local school districts, case-based instruction, continuous supervision, and authentic assessment of outcomes, credential candidates completed a two year internship program consisting of special education coursework with emphases on urban and multicultural education. Training emphasized direct application of theory into practice. Interns were team taught and supervised by the special education faculty and doctoral students

with bilingual, multicultural, and urban expertise. Courses focused on the application of effective instructional practices in both general and special education for diverse children with mild-moderate disabilities and their families. Interns were trained on-the-job in highly diverse, inner city school districts. This innovative para-to-teacher career ladder project could serve as a national and State model for preparing personnel for careers in urban, multicultural special education.

### **Objectives and Activities of the Training Project**

- 1) Recruit 40 paraeducators and substitutes from diverse and underrepresented groups;
  - A comprehensive outreach and recruitment plan was implemented to identify paraeducators and substitutes as potential candidates for the project.
  - Recruitment was carried out in collaboration with urban school districts in this region.
  - Major recruitment efforts were directed toward increasing the number of African American, Latino, and Asian candidates.
  - Candidates were recruited from a pool of paraeducators and noncertified substitutes in inner city classrooms, with a bachelor's degree, who were unable to pursue further training because of financial, time, or access barriers.
  - Enable bilingual and minority paraeducators and substitutes to advance on the career ladder to fully certified special day class teachers or resource specialists.
  
- 2) Provide financial assistance for project candidates;
  - Financial assistance covered costs for the program, plus books, fees, etc. (75% of budget was allocated for student support).
  - A special education paraeducator earns \$11,231 per year in the first year of employment and \$16,345 after six years. Because candidates were trained on-the-job as interns, they earned \$27,952 in the first year in the project and \$29,070 in the second year almost tripling their annual income. Financial assistance therefore included both support from the project and a substantial raise in income and benefits.
  
- 3) Implement an urban, multicultural special education emphasis in training credential candidates;
  - Candidates were prepared to connect research and theory with practical

- applications to be used in urban, high poverty classroom environments.
  - In order to manage the complex factors and circumstances which arise in the urban classrooms, a case-based curriculum was used to illustrate the great variety of teaching problems faced by novice teachers.
  - Specific preparation to prepared candidates to be aware of, and knowledgeable about, cultural and socio-economic differences, communication styles, cognitive orientations, and societal norms for different ethnic groups.
- 4) Disseminate information about an alternative para-to-teacher model for preparing special educators to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children with disabilities.
- Descriptive reports of the training model presented at State and national conferences and in professional publications (see attached articles from TESE and Academic Exchange Quarterly).

### **Conceptual Framework for the Training Project**

The San Francisco Bay Area is experiencing a dramatic increase in the number of minority and bilingual mild-moderately K-12 students with disabilities particularly in urban schools which impacts the regional need for more credential graduates to fill teaching positions. Special education enrollments in Bay Area urban classrooms range from 85% to 100% minority and bilingual students. Over 60 languages are spoken by the families sending their children to the urban districts in this region. Special educators who work with these populations must be prepared to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in urban settings, have training in a wide variety of instructional methods that have a direct connection to the needs of children, parents, and general educators, and a command of the technology required for serving special populations. Further, more minority and bilingual special educators must be recruited and trained to work with bilingual and minority children with disabilities.

California is on the frontline of demographic change. Statewide, there has been a dramatic rise in birth rates, immigration, and the number of linguistic minority children. In high poverty, central city school districts, the majority of schools had vacancies that could not be filled with a

qualified special education teacher. California surpasses all other states with over 100,000 full time and part-time paraeducators. The majority of these paraeducators (also known as instructional assistants, teacher aides, classroom aides, etc.) work in special education programs. In urban schools, where there are high proportions of uncertified teachers and temporary, long term substitutes, it is not unusual to find paraeducators doing the work of teachers *without* the pay.

Although paraeducator roles have become more demanding, career advancement and continuing education opportunities have been neglected. Because of the growing demand for minority and bilingual teachers qualified to work in high need areas, such as urban special education, the concept of career ladder programs, whereby paraeducators advance into professional ranks, must be explored.

### **Description of the training model and participants**

#### *Training Model*

In light of the critical shortage of qualified and certified special education teachers and the low percentage of minority and bilingual special education teachers in the urban schools in this region, the project was designed to fully qualify, as mild-moderate learning specialists, four cohorts of minority and bilingual paraeducators and long term uncredentialed substitutes. As an integral part of the project, interns are trained on-the-job in urban special education classrooms with high minority and bilingual student enrollments. In addition to teaching full time, candidates enrolled in two to three courses per semester leading toward a credential and optional master's degree in special education.

Candidates were required to successfully demonstrate the following outcomes at the completion of the program: (1) a broad knowledge of the theoretical, developmental, historical, environmental and legal foundations; (2) a knowledge of instructional procedures and curricula; (3)

skill in consultation, collaboration, communication, and teaming in inclusive settings; (4) skill in formal and informal diagnostic procedures; (5) skill in counseling and working with multicultural families and the community; (6) skill in selecting, using, adapting, evaluating, identifying resources using computers and instructional technology materials; and (7) skill in the instructional application of content in urban multicultural field-based settings.

The methods employed to assess these outcomes included: course assignments, logs, reports, papers, and projects; observations in the classroom and in the field; semester and final reviews of interns progress; and conferences with school district personnel. The assessment of interns in the field was the responsibility of both the university supervisor and the district support provider. The *California Standards for the Teaching Profession* addresses the diversity of the student population and reflects a developmental view of teaching across six domains: e.g., planning instruction and designing learning experiences; organizing subject matter knowledge; etc. Interns in Project ART, in collaboration with their supervisor, established professional and personal goals in each of the domains. Overall progress was reviewed at the end of each semester in a three-way evaluation with the intern, supervisor, and district (or school site) administrator.

Each candidate completed a 36 unit teacher credential program leading to full state certification in the area of the mild-moderate disabilities. All courses were team taught by at least one faculty member and one doctoral associate. Candidates began their training by taking two core general education courses, Early Literacy and Curriculum and Instruction in the Teaching Fields with general education credential candidates. In the second through fourth semesters, candidates took six special education courses and two one year internship field practica. In the fifth and sixth semesters, candidates completed a total of three advanced special education seminars while continuing their internship. The project provided immersion in urban multicultural schools while interns were concurrently learning the instructional knowledge and skills needed to teach. Coursework included the competencies required to meet the academic and fieldwork standards for a California special education credential plus additional competencies related to culturally diverse urban classrooms, collaboration, inclusion, and instructional technology. Graduates received a clear

California specialist credential when they completed program requirements.

### *Participants*

In Project ART, candidates entered the program in a cohort group and worked with the same cadre of fellow students and faculty for two years. Research suggests that retention of university students is enhanced by membership in a cohort group. The cohort acts as an extended support system, particularly for candidates from underrepresented and nontraditional populations. Candidates were recruited from a pool of paraeducators and noncertified substitutes in urban classrooms, with a bachelor's degree (in California, all Education training is at the graduate level). The incentives to participate in the project included: (1) an opportunity for paraeducators and substitutes to advance on the career ladder and become fully certified special class teachers or resource specialists, (2) financial assistance, (3) an increase in salary concomitant with the assumption of a teaching position, (4) mentoring and intensive supervision for two full years, and (5) the option of earning a master's degree within the two year training period.

### *Project Outcomes*

The main impact of the project has been to increase the quality and number of fully qualified special education teachers to work in high poverty, urban schools with highly diverse special needs learners. The project utilized seven features of special education personnel training which were highly effective in preparing candidates from underrepresented groups for careers in special education.

1) recruitment of paraeducators and noncertified substitutes already living and working in urban settings,



- 2) use of cohort groups to increase retention during training,
- 3) use of intensive field supervision by university supervisors and school district support providers,
- 4) placement of credential candidates in high poverty, central city classrooms with a majority of minority bilingual special education students,
- 5) incorporation of urban/multicultural competencies into the curriculum,
- 6) instruction delivered by special education faculty and doctoral associates with extensive experience in urban multicultural special education classrooms,
- 7) opportunities to conduct action research within the classroom and school setting with minority and bilingual children with disabilities.

### **Project Outcomes**

Objective 1: Recruit 40 paraeducators and substitutes from diverse and underrepresented groups.

In four years, 79 paraeducators and substitutes were recruited to the project. Over 95% completed the program and received their clear special education credential. More than half the candidates were recruited from underrepresented groups.

Objective 2: Provide financial assistance for project candidates. Over 75% of the budget was utilized for student support including tuition, textbooks, teacher test preparation, student travel, professional membership fees, etc. Once candidates were admitted to the program and completed an intensive summer of instruction, they were hired by local urban districts as teachers. Prior to entering the program, the paraeducators were earning a salary of approximately \$16,345 a year; many were not receiving benefits. Because candidates were trained on-the-job, they immediately earned \$27,952 in the first year in the project and \$29,070 in the second year almost tripling their annual income. Financial assistance therefore included both support from the project and a substantial raise in income and the guarantee of benefits.

Objective 3: Implement an urban, multicultural special education emphasis in training credential candidates.

Objective 4: Disseminate information about an alternative para-to-teacher model for preparing special educators to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children with disabilities.

Descriptive reports of the training model were presented at State and national conferences and in professional publications. Articles about the project were published in TESE (in press) and Academic Exchange Quarterly (Summer, 2002).



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