Experiences of Redesigning an Elementary Education Program

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Abstract

This paper aims to share the experiences of redesigning an elementary education program. Steps of redesigning the elementary education program were enumerated. Challenges in the redesign of the elementary education program were discussed. The new elementary education program were described. Lessons learned from the redesign of the elementary education program were shared.

Keywords: experiences, redesign, elementary education program

Experiences of Redesigning an Elementary Education Program

When I became the coordinator of the elementary education program at Indiana University Southeast in Fall 2013, the first cohort to go through the then elementary education program was in the last semester of the program when teacher candidates had to take two classes and do student teaching. There were concerns from cooperating teachers about the time teacher candidates was able to spend in the classrooms, and from teacher candidates about splitting between the two classes and student teaching in the same semester. I talked to the faculty and cooperating teachers to figure out a better way to schedule the two classes and student teaching. The overwhelming response I got was to spend the last semester student teaching without having to take two classes. I realized that figuring out the schedule was a short-term fix but redesigning the program would be a long-term fix. That was how I was motivated to take the charge to redesign the elementary education program.

Steps of Redesigning the Elementary Education Program

The first thing I did was to study the program checksheet. There were 120 credit hours in the program, including 30 credits for general education, 35 credits for content courses, and 55 credits for professional education courses. Among the general education and content courses, there were 9 credit hours for language arts, 9 for math, 11 for science, and 6 for social science. All students were required to take social science content (9 more credit hours) as the concentration. Should students take another concentration, they would have to go over 120 credit hours. The additional credit hours for different concentration vary: 6 credit hours for language arts, 14-16 credit hours for math, and 6 credit hours for science. They also had to take two courses and do student teaching in the last semester of the program.

The second thing I did was to align the program with the Indiana Developmental Standards for Educators and Indiana Content Standards for Educators. The alignment showed weaknesses of the program: the content standards of fine arts and health, wellness, and physical education; and the developmental standards of learning environment and professional environment.

The third thing I did was to look at the elementary education program across the other IU campuses. A spreadsheet was prepared to line up the general education courses, content courses and education courses.

The fourth thing I did was to collect feedback from stakeholders. Surveys were given to teacher candidates (N=94) in the program and focus groups were used as a follow up to the survey responses.

1. There was 78% of teacher candidates who would like to do student teaching without having to take two courses in the same semester. Focus group with teacher candidates and cooperating teachers expressed concerns of taking two classes in six weeks and completing student teaching in 10 weeks. They would like to have the whole semester for student teaching so that they could implement co-teaching model in student teaching better.
2. There was 85% of teacher candidates who would like to choose a content area as a concentration without going above 120 credit hours. Focus groups with school principals revealed the need to have teacher candidates with knowledge of a variety of content areas. Instead of taking social science as a mandatory concentration, teacher candidates should be able to choose if they would concentrate on language arts, math, science or social science.

3. There was 89% of teacher candidates who would like to take technology course. Focus groups with advisory board members also supported the need for teacher candidates to be able to integrate technology in their instruction. Instead of learning technology in student teaching, technology courses should be integrated with method classes throughout the program.

The fifth thing I did was to convene meetings with elementary education program faculty to analyze the data collected from program checksheet, state standards, surveys and focus groups. Discussion of the following questions was done in Spring 2014.

1. What courses should be required as content courses in language arts, math, science and social science?
2. What courses should be included as concentration courses in language arts, math, science and social science?
3. What courses should be included as education courses?
4. What should be the sequence of the education courses?
5. What should be covered in field experiences and seminars?
6. Are the proposed changes in alignment with the state standards?
7. What should be the admission requirement?
8. What should be the program GPA requirement?

Challenges in the Redesign of the Elementary Education Program

The biggest challenge was to make student teaching the whole semester and move the two courses away from the student teaching semester. The current program gave 6 credit hours to student teaching and 6 credits to the other two courses. If student teaching was the only course in the last semester, it should be 12 credit hours for a full-time load.

The other challenge was to allow teacher candidates to choose their own concentrations. The current program mandated students to take 9 credit hours for social studies concentration. If they chose other concentration, they had to take additional 6 credit hours for language arts, 14-16 credit hours for math, and 6 credit hours for science. To encourage students to choose one of the content areas as concentration, the required credit hours should be equal. To be good at the concentration, the required credit hours should also be more than 9.

The next challenge was to add courses to address the needs of stakeholders and to meet state standards. A technology course was needed so that teacher candidates were able to integrate technology in their instruction. A math intervention course was also needed to prepare teacher candidates for implementing intervention to children with difficulties in math.

Where to get the extra credit hours was challenging! Finally, it was decided that the 8 credit hours for electives in the current program would be reduced to 3 credit hours for electives in language arts, math and social studies concentration and to 4 credit hours for electives in science concentration. In addition, K452 Classroom management was removed from the program to get another 3 credit hours. Instead of taking classroom management as a course, teacher candidates would pick up classroom management skills from field experiences and seminars throughout the program.

The New Elementary Education Program

After much deliberation, the elementary education program was redesigned in response to the feedback from stakeholders. No major changes were needed for content courses. One course was added to social science content. The current program required 9 credit hours for language arts, 9 for math, 11 for science, and 6 for social science. The proposed program required 9 credit hours in language arts, math, and social science content; and 11 credit hours in science content.

Table 1

Content Areas of the Current and Proposed Elementary Education Programs

Content Areas	Current Program	Proposed Program
Language Arts	ENG-W131(3) Elementary composition	ENG-W131(3) Elementary composition
	ENG-W250(3) Writing in context	ENG-W250(3) Writing in context
	ENG-L101(3) Western world masterpieces I or ENG-L102(3) Western world masterpieces II	ENG-L101(3) Western world masterpieces I or ENG-L102(3) Western world masterpieces II
Math	MATH-T101(3) Math for elementary teachers I	MATH-T101(3) Math for elementary teachers I
	MATH-T102(3) Math for elementary teachers II	MATH-T102(3) Math for elementary teachers II
	MATH-T103(3) Math for elementary teachers III	MATH-T103(3) Math for elementary teachers III
Science	CHEM-C104(5) Physical science & society	CHEM-C104(5) Physical science & society
	BIOL-L100(3) Humans and the biological world	BIOL-L100(3) Humans and the biological world
	GEOG-G107(3) Physical systems of the environment	GEOG-G107(3) Physical systems of the environment
Social Science	POLS-Y103(3) Intro to American politics	POLS-Y103(3) Intro to American politics
	HIST-H105(3)American history to1865or HIST-H106(3) American history since 1865	HIST-H105(3)American history to1865or HIST-H106(3) American history since 1865
		GEOG-G201(3) World regional geography

The current program required 6 credit hours for language arts but the proposed program required 15 credit hours. The current program required 14-16 credit hours for math but the proposed program required 15 credit hours. The current program required 6 credit hours for science but the proposed program required 15 credit hours. The current program required 9 credit hours for social studies but the proposed program required 15 credit hours.

Table 2

Concentration of the Current and Proposed Elementary Education Programs

Concentration	Current Program	Proposed Program
Language arts concentration	ENG-W203(3) Creative writing or ENG-W207(3) Intro to fiction writing or ENG-W290(3) Writing in the Arts & Sciences or ENG-W315(3) Writing for the web	ENG-W270(3) Argumentative writing or ENG-W350(3) Advanced Expository Writing
	ENG-L204(3) Intro to the novel & short story or ENG-L205(3) Intro to poetry or ENG-L207(3) Women & literature or ENG-L370 (3) Recent black American writing or ENG-L379(3) American ethnic & minority literature	ENG-L101(3) Western world masterpieces I or ENG-L102(3) Western world masterpieces II or ENG-L 107 (3) Oriental World Masterpieces **or** ENG-L 374 (3) Ethnic American Literature **or** ENG-L 378 (3) Studies in Women & Literature **or** AFRO-A 169 (3) Introduction to African American Literature
		ENG-G205(3) Introduction to the English Language or ENG-G207(3) Grammar & usage
		EDUC-X 460(3) Books for Reading Instruction
		Electives (3)
Mathematics concentration	MATH-M118(3) Finite mathematics	MATH-M118(3) Finite mathematics
	MATH-M122(3) College Algebra or MATH-M125(3) Pre-calculus mathematics	MATH-M122(3) College Algebra
	MATH-M126(2) Trigonometric functions	MATH-M126(3) Trigonometric functions
	MATH-M119(3) Brief survey of calculus or MATH-M215(5) Analytic geometry and calculus	
	MATH-K300(3) Statistical techniques	MATH-K300(3) Statistical techniques
		Electives (3)
Science concentration	AST-A100(3) The Solar System or AST-A105(3) Stellar Astronomy	AST-A100(3) The Solar System or AST-A105(3) Stellar Astronomy or

		AST-A200(3) Intro to Cosmology
	GEOG-G304(3) Meteorology & physical climatology or BIOL-L350(3) Environmental Biology or GEOG-G315(3) Environmental conservation	BIOL-L200(3) Environmental Biology and Conservation
		PHYS-P 100 (5) Physics in the modern world
		Electives (4)
Social studies concentration	HIST-H101(3) World in 20th Century	HIST-E 100 (3) Introduction to African History or HIST-F 100 (3) Issues in Latin American History or HIST-G 100 (3) Introduction to Asian History or HIST-H101(3) World in 20th Century or HIST-W 101 (3) World Civilization to 1500
	ECON-E101(3) Current economic topics or ECON-E150(3) Introduction to Economics	ECON-E101(3) Current economic topics or ECON-E201(3) Introduction to Microeconomics
	GEOG-G201(3) World regional geography	
		SOC-S163(3) Social problems or SOC-R 220 (3) The Family or SOC-S 309 (3) The Community
		HIST-H105(3) American history to 1865 or HIST-H106(3) American history since 1865
		Electives (3)

The elementary education program admits students who have completed the general education courses and content courses. The current program required 55 credits for professional education courses but the proposed program required 60 credits. The education courses are offered in blocks across four semesters. The current program required 15 credits in block 1, 14

credits in block 2, 14 credits in block 3 and 12 credits in block 4. The proposed program required 16 credits in block 1, 2, and 3; and 12 credits in block 4.

Table 3

Elementary Education Courses of the Current and Proposed Programs

	Current Program	Proposed Program
Block 1		E339(3) Teaching language arts
	P250(3) Educational psychology	P250(3) Educational psychology
	M310(2) General methods	
	E495(2) Intro to early childhood education	P248(2) Elementary child development
	K205(3) Exceptional children	K205(2) Exceptional children
	M300(3) Teach in pluralistic society	M300(3) Teach in pluralistic society
		W201(1) Beginning technology skills
	F401(1) Seminar	F401(1) Seminar
	M301(1) Practicum	M301(1) Practicum
Block 2	E339(3) Teaching language arts	
	E340(3) Teaching reading I	E340(3) Teaching reading I
		E343(3) Mathematics methods
		E325(3) Social studies methods
		M323(2) Teaching music in elementary school
		M333(2) Arts experiences for the elementary teachers
	M350(2) Teaching about the Arts and Physical Education	
	E449(3) Trade Books & Classroom Teacher	
		W301(1) Integrating technology into teaching I
	F401(1) Seminar	F401(1) Seminar
	M301(1) Practicum	M201(1) Practicum
Block 3	E328(3) Science methods	E328(3) Science methods
	E343(3) Mathematics methods	
		N443(2) Teaching elementary school math problem solving
	E325(3) Social studies methods	
	E341(3) Teaching reading II	E341(3) Teaching reading II
		P320(3) Classroom assessment

		M356(2) Health & wellness for teachers
		W401(1) Integrating technology into teaching II
	F401(1) Seminar	F401(1) Seminar
	M301(1) Practicum	M301(1) Practicum
Block 4	M425(6) Student teaching	M425(11) Student teaching
	K452(3) Classroom management	
	E495(3) School-based assessment	
		F401(1) Seminar

Lessons Learned from the Redesign of the Elementary Education Program

1. Learn the system how to make curriculum and program changes.

Any changes to curriculum and program require approval from different level. It is important to be familiar with the system to submit documents for approval.

The proposed program added technology and math intervention courses, and replaced some courses with different course numbers. There were altogether 11 courses that I had to get the syllabi ready to request authorization to be offered on campus. New courses were more difficult to get the syllabi because faculty volunteered to write them. Those course replaced with different course numbers were easier to get the syllabi because existing syllabi could be used with minor modification. After my initiation of the authorization request, the process moved on to get approval from the Dean, the Education Council, the Academic Policy Committee, the Faculty Senate, and the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs.

The proposed program changed the credit hours needed for the concentration; added and removed content, concentration, and education courses; moved the sequence of education courses, and restructured the student teaching semester. These program changes needed approval from the Elementary Education Program, Curriculum Development Committee, School of

Education faculty, the Education Council, the Academic Policy Committee, the Faculty Senate, and the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs.

2. Get the buy-in from other faculty.

Whenever there are changes to the curriculum or program, other faculty would like to have their opinions be considered. Even though the changes were in the elementary education program and elementary faculty had already approved them, faculty from the other program had questions about the changes because they did not understand the rationale of the changes and they would like their opinions to be considered. I was able to spot some questions and communicate with some faculty to clear their concerns before the proposed program was brought to the faculty meeting for approval. It is easier to handle these questions and get the buy-in from other faculty on a one-to-one basis than in the faculty meeting.

3. Work out the timeline to implement the new program.

After finishing the redesigning of the new elementary education program in Spring 2014, it took one year to get approval from all levels to offer the new courses and implement the new program. However, it did not mean that the new program could be implemented right away after it was approved in Spring 2015. In fact, the new program only applied to the incoming freshmen in Fall 2015 and the old program still applied to all other students. To make it more complicated, the changes in the education courses could start with the students who would start the first block of the elementary education program in Fall 2015.

The transition of the old program to the new program would take two years from Fall 2015 to Spring 2017. First, freshmen starting in Fall 2015 or after would follow the new program requirement. They would be able to choose a concentration. Second, teacher candidates who were already in the elementary education program would follow the old program. They would

still have to take two classes when they do their student teaching. Third, teacher candidates who would start the elementary education program in Fall 2015 or after would follow the education courses in the new program and the pre-education courses in the old program. They were still mandated to have social studies as the concentration but they would not have to take two classes when they do their student teaching. By Fall 2017, all teacher candidates, whether they are already in the elementary education program or in pre-elementary education program, would be under the new program requirements.

The two-year transition made scheduling classes and teaching load to faculty a challenging task. Basically, there were three different checksheets I had to use to schedule the classes to these three groups of teacher candidates and to the same group of faculty. Careful attention was needed so as to avoid overlapping schedules of faculty teaching load. Since some education courses were in different blocks in the new and old programs, teacher candidates following the new and old programs had to take them in the same semester. To avoid overload of faculty, I used a flexible plan to schedule few hours in one semester and more hours in the other semester.