

## Creating a Dual Licensure Program in Elementary and Special Education that Prepares Culturally Responsive Teachers

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In light of shifting demographics in today's classrooms, the faculty at Springfield College recognized a need to revamp their teacher licensure program to incorporate a leadership component. The journey began with a self-evaluation process and culminated with creation of a dual licensure program in elementary and special education to encourage more effective instruction and culturally responsive teaching. The authors present a roadmap for the launch of the dual licensure program, designed to prepare teachers in collaborative inclusion classrooms to take leadership roles as change agents in today's increasingly diverse schools.

**Keywords:** dual licensure program, culturally responsive teaching, collaborative teaching, English language learners, ELLs, special education, leadership, effective instruction, differentiated instruction, teacher preparation

The face of our nation is changing and our public schools bear a major responsibility for addressing disparities through the design and delivery of effective instruction. School leaders must address the change in makeup of the overall student population if schools are to serve the needs of all learners. Minority populations, especially Hispanics, are growing more quickly than the population as a whole. Between 2000 and 2010, 15 states—six of them in the Northeast—saw their White populations decline. During this same period, the African American population declined in Alaska and Hawaii while Hispanic and Asian populations grew in every state (Jiandani, 2012).

The persistence of disparities between students of color and White students in academic achievement continues to present challenges within the educational community. Graduation rate is one important indicator of high school performance that reflects academic achievement levels. Between 1940 and 2011, the graduation rates for all minorities increased. However, in 2011, the graduation rates for Hispanics and African Americans were still lower than the rate for Whites (Jiandani, 2012). The graduation rate among students of color has been reported to be as much as 25 percentage points below their White peers (*Alliance for Excellent Education Fact Sheet, 2010*).

The National Center for Education Statistics published data in June of 2009 promulgating that 99% of elementary schools in the United States reported enrolling students on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 72% of elementary schools reported serving students who were identified as Limited English Proficient. The National Education Association and National Association of School Psychologists (2007) reported that the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in special education programs has been a national concern for nearly four decades. English language learners (ELLs)— children for whom English is often a third or fourth language —are the fastest growing subgroup of students in public schools, representing nearly nine percent of the population. The number of ELLs entering into special education is a significant problem (Zamora, 2007). For decades, many school districts have struggled with differentiating the educational needs of ELL students from students with learning disabilities.

After careful review, the faculty at Springfield College realized that the licensure programs did not fully address the challenges and opportunities that accompany the demographic shift. The journey began with the self-evaluation process that precedes an accreditation visit. It was determined that the program was at variance with the mission of the college, which is “to educate students in spirit, mind, and body for leadership in service to humanity.” In particular, it was determined that a leadership component was needed as part of the preparation program (Bazron, & Fleischman, 2005). Consequently, the first priority was to chart a course that would prepare teachers to take leadership roles as change agents in schools. There was also a need to design a roadmap that would lead to a dual licensure program in elementary and special education. This dual licensure program would prepare culturally responsive teachers to serve and lead in collaborative inclusion elementary classrooms.

In short, at the time this project began, the pre-service elementary teacher preparation program at Springfield College would have been described as a traditional model that encompassed a four-year bachelor’s degree program leading to initial licensure. While the Springfield College teacher education program enjoyed a proud reputation for field intensive preparation that integrated theory and practice, it lacked strategies consistent with the changing demographics in schools.

Springfield College offers ten educator preparation programs at the undergraduate level. There are teacher preparation programs in physical education, health, elementary, special education (leading to licensure in moderate disabilities), early childhood, biology, English, history, mathematics, and the visual arts. In addition programs in chemistry, earth science, political science, school guidance and school adjustment counseling are available at the graduate level. Over the years, hundreds of quality educators for PreK-12 school settings have been prepared. For the academic year 2010-2011 the total number of Springfield College students enrolled in educator preparation programs was 262 (116 males and 146 females). The enrollment by race was 91% White, 3% Black or African American, 3% Hispanic/Latino of any race, 2% Asian, and 1% race undisclosed. The elementary licensure program was selected for restructuring because the faculty members in this program were most willing to pilot the proposed integrated program and because several of the courses in the program were required of all licensure candidates.

Through their fieldwork experiences candidates were already immersed in the new demographic. All of our candidates complete fieldwork in the Springfield Public Schools (SPS). This urban district serves 22,230 students: 14% White, 21% Black or African American, 60% Hispanic/Latino of any race, 2% Asian, and 3% Multiracial. There are 5,006 students receiving special education services (20%), 16% are identified as Limited English Proficient, and 25% reported that they do not speak English as a first language. These students represent 50 different native languages. In addition to meeting the needs of a diverse student population, the socioeconomic levels pose another challenge in Springfield Public Schools. Of the students enrolled in SPS, 86% qualify for free or reduced lunch and 54% are eligible for free transportation.

While the licensure programs taught pre-service teachers about differentiating instruction to support ELL students and students with IEPs, the institutional self study revealed that not enough was being done to prepare candidates to work with the diverse population in the SPS. Also, candidates were not adequately prepared to work collaboratively with the team of professionals who were supporting these students. The initial self-study revealed that while standards were met for accreditation, the program strategies were not consistent with that aspect of the mission of the College which calls for "...students for leadership in service to others." It was determined that there was a need to change the programs to ensure that pre-service teachers were entering field experiences equipped to meet the needs of all learners. We determined that for our programs to meet this goal the best approach was to create a dual licensure program in elementary and special education that was grounded in the principles of differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching (Anderson & Madigan, 2005; George, 2005; Utley, Delquadri, Obiakor, & Mims, 2000).

Simultaneous to discussions about changing the programs, a planning team was trained and supported by the Monarch Center, a national technical assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, to identify design strategies to ensure the accomplishment of the objectives of a dual licensure program in elementary and special education. The three-member team consisted of (a) the chair of the education department, (b) an action research faculty member from the education department, and (c) a faculty member from our physical education department who specialized in adaptive physical education. This interdepartmental collaboration helped promote institutional buy-in while at the same time supported divergent thinking about the potential for a dual licensure program.

In preparation for the work with the Monarch Center, the planning team met to establish a common language based on the shared understanding of differentiated instruction, collaboration, and culturally responsive teaching. Our working definitions and baseline parameters were as follows:

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Huebner (2010) maintains that at the core of effective differentiated instruction (DI), the needs and learning styles of each student must be identified, and appropriate learning activities and assessments aligned to meet those needs. This approach allows all students to access the same classroom curriculum. The approach provides entry points, learning tasks, and outcomes that are

tailored to students' needs (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003) with the underlying goal of maximizing "...student growth and individual success" (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000, p. 4). Once baseline data are collected to determine student readiness, the teacher designs whole group, small group, and independent activities based on student needs, learning styles, and areas of interest. One major tenant of differentiated instruction is the concept that learners discover how to demonstrate mastery of the content. Assessments must also be differentiated based upon a learner's ability and interest. Learning packets including individualized rubrics help guide students to attain the assessment benchmarks.

The foci of differentiated learning strategies parallel the underlying constructs of the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) process. Differentiated instruction complements the body of research that informs teachers of how to meet the needs of students who qualify for special services per Public Law 94-142 and its subsequent reauthorizations (IDEA 1997, IDEA 2004) and broadens these constructs to include all students, with, and without IEPs.

### **Collaboration**

Based on the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision in 1982 (*Hendrick Hudson School District v. Rowley* (458 US 176, 1982)), followed by the 2004 amendments to IDEA (P.L. 108-446, 2004), the merger of special education and general education is viewed as benefiting all children in the classroom (Pugach, Blanton & Correa, 2011).

When two or more professionals utilize the expertise of each other for the educational gains of individual students, this can be a dynamic process for student learning. Friend and Cook (2003) describe five specific collaborative parameters: (a) parity, (b) mutual goals, (c) shared responsibility in decision making, (d) shared resources and accountability, and (e) valuing personal opinions and expertise. The special education professional has the expertise to provide the support for learners who qualify for special accommodations. Together with the general classroom educator, and based on a mutually respectful co-teaching or team-teaching model, teachers can foster the teacher-centered component of the lesson. However, the preparation of teachers to work effectively in a collaborative model has lagged behind the philosophical premises that underlie this concept.

Teacher educational programs must prepare teachers to address a range of student abilities by using a range of instructional approaches, student response options, and learning assessment techniques. The goal of Springfield faculty is to prepare highly qualified teachers who, at the end of their teacher preparation program, will be licensed as elementary education teachers and special education teachers. The current merged program incorporates all of the highly qualified teacher preparation standards in an integrated spiraling series of courses and placements designed to address the needs of all children with and without disabilities from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the elementary education classroom.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive teaching recognizes that all students bring rich cultural and linguistic experiences to the classroom that influences personal learning styles. Additionally, the teacher's

cultural experiences impact his/her chosen pedagogical strategies (Brandan, 2007; Gay, 2002; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006). Gay (2010) maintains that culturally relevant teachers display cultural competence that she described as “the ability to design and deliver instruction in a cross-cultural or multicultural setting.” This instructional skill set enables each student to relate course content to his or her cultural context and provides effective strategies for students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Scholars who discuss a culturally responsive pedagogical approach insist that the structure is a matrix of practices and concepts rather than a singular fixed concept. According to Tiedt and Tiedt (2010), the term multicultural education was used for the first time as a topic heading by Education Index in 1978, at which time the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education included it as a standard. Manning and Baruth (2009) suggested that multicultural education is both a concept and a process, designed to “teach learners to recognize, accept, and appreciate differences in culture, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, religion, special needs and gender” (p. 5). Bennett (2011) characterizes cultural responsive instructional strategies as a “complex approach to teaching and learning that includes equity in schools and classrooms, transformation of curriculum, multicultural competence, and commitment to address societal injustices” (p. 3). Banks (1991, 2004, 2006) has historically advanced a definition of multicultural education as a broad concept embracing five specific dimensions: (a) content integration, (b) knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) equity pedagogy, and (e) empowering school culture and social structure (2004). Nieto and Bode (2008) describe the main characteristics of multicultural education as “antiracist, basic, important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process and critical pedagogy” (p. 44).

Effective culturally responsive teachers reflect and engage in critical self-analysis and understand how personal cultural and linguistic context influences educational strategies and student learning. Teachers use this information to set high expectations for their students, provide scaffolding to support student achievement, and learn about, as well as alongside, their students (Gay, 2002, 2010; Nieto, 2010). Culturally responsive instruction provides educators with the opportunities to respond to and honor diversity within a classroom. Additionally, it gives students the ability to sensitively respond to one another by adjusting a mono-cultural curriculum to an atmosphere where learners, according to Bennett (2011), move towards greater understandings of different systems of perceiving, evaluating, believing, and doing.

## **Creating a Plan**

In June of 2010 the three-member team attended the Monarch Center’s interactive training seminar, and constructed an action plan that included goals, timelines, responsible individuals, and potential barriers for accomplishing those goals. Our overall goal was agreed upon prior to attending. We aimed to use collaboration as the context and content for supporting a SPED/Elementary Education dual licensure program. The seminar team created the objectives and timelines based on information and resources provided. The first objective was to create a professional learning community including general education, special education, and physical education faculty members at Springfield College as well as other stakeholders needed to ensure the success of our program. The three key senior administrators, the Director of Teacher Preparation and Licensure, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, and the Academic Vice President had

already pledged support for the proposed dual licensure program. The details and procedures of the action plan were presented to the key senior administrators to determine how best to move forward as an institution.

The second objective was to use the knowledge base on collaboration to examine the curriculum for alignment with dual licensure requirements. Initially, it was believed that this could best be accomplished by starting with one course as a model. Later it was decided that the process would be better served if three courses were used so as to provide a more synergistic outcome. Hence, the initial pilot consisted of three methods courses.

The Director of Teacher Preparation and Licensure and the Vice President for Academic Affairs were eager to assist in the implementation of the proposed dual licensure program and fully supported the action plan. Because the existing licensure programs had seen declining enrollments over the past decade, there had been multiple discussions about strategies for creating a “niche program” that could be marketed to reverse this trend.

### **Gaining Critical Internal Supports**

The administrative support was both financial and structural. Internal grants were awarded to two faculty members to take an on-line course for retooling. The faculty recognized that the teacher pre-service preparation programs were not preparing teachers to work in collaborative inclusion and culturally responsive settings. An Appleton grant was received for internal retraining of faculty, which was necessary to ensure that support would be in place to collaborate on the new program. Additionally, one of the team members was given a three-credit release to conduct contributory research. The intent of the release time project was to ensure that the changes proposed were data driven and aligned with current best practices and accreditation standards.

The implementation of the proposed plan progressed with the curricular changes. Departmental commitment to the dual licensure program was evident as other financial supports for faculty development opportunities continued. The faculty development committee and the senior administration recognized the enormity of the work involved and the expertise necessary to transition from a traditional preparation program to a collaborative model. Funding support was given to two faculty members for sabbaticals to investigate culturally responsive teaching, instruction for English Language Learners, and the collaborative inclusion classroom. In addition to these internal grants, a retired special education faculty member was hired as a consultant to help faculty redesign syllabi to include objectives and activities to ensure that all courses in the Elementary Education / Special Education licensure program met the new standards.

The support was not just financial. Meetings were arranged by senior management to give credence to the need to move forward with the dual licensure program. The Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Director of Teacher Preparation and Licensure, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the Dean of Physical/Health Education and all the chairs of departments associated with licensure met on a monthly basis to ensure that the institutional collaboration that was necessary to move this new program through the internal curriculum committee and ultimately state accreditation process was in place. While most institutional change is more of an evolution than a revolution, the dual licensure initiative moved forward with unprecedented speed. With

the guidance of the educational consultant, the department concomitantly worked through redesigning methods courses as models for inclusion classrooms in a culturally responsive environment.

The purpose of any methods course is to provide models and frameworks for teaching. The main scaffolding for any lesson is the lesson plan. As our work unfolded, we saw the need to alter the templates for pre-service lesson plans to include tiered instruction and address the tenants of culturally responsive teaching. For course modifications to acquire approval from the internal curriculum committee, the rationale, the specific changes, and the assessments needed to be clearly articulated and supported. Each new objective required the specific parameters for assessing the outcomes. The first three courses to go through this overhaul were the mathematics methods class, the reading methods class, and the social studies methods class.

Given that the mathematics methods course was the first in the sequence of methods courses, we decided that the concept of collaborative teaching, within our spiraling curriculum, would be introduced in this course and reinforced in each subsequent methods course. Furthermore, we decided that whatever format was selected for collaborative teaching, the five collaborative “Ps” had to be addressed: Presence, Planning, Presenting, Problem Solving, and Processing. To better understand these five tenants, consider their underlying questions:

- Presence – How will co-teaching be conveyed to students?
- Planning – When/how will faculty collaborate on the lesson planning?
- Presenting – Who will take the lead on each lesson component and what is the responsibility of the other teacher?
- Problem solving – How will management issues and the needs of struggling students be addressed?
- Processing – When /how will the process be reflected?

As candidates worked through course assignments, they determined how these questions would be answered within each lesson. Because the candidates were, and continue to be, introduced to lesson planning as a collaborative process, we assert that they be exposed to unified planning. The collaborative approach will become a familiar process for them. Candidates’ ability to design collaborative lessons was, and will continue to be, assessed through the effectiveness of their team-designed lessons and unit plans where team members include the special education and general education candidates.

The committee was determined to move forward with a uniform transformation process. Many meetings were held to determine what changes were necessary within the individual courses and how consistency would be ensured. Ultimately, it was decided that each of the methods courses would, at a minimum, include three new objectives that demonstrated that these methods courses were designed to prepare candidates to teach in culturally responsive, collaborative, inclusion classrooms. The instructors for the three methods courses determined that the three objectives added to each syllabus would be:

1. Candidates will be able to design and implement lessons that differentiate concepts (i.e. *mathematical*) across ability levels.
2. Candidates will be able to design lessons that are culturally relevant.
3. Candidates will be able to design lessons that address the needs of English language learners.

Candidates demonstrate their proficiency with each objective by the following activities. Differentiation is demonstrated by: (a) differentiation of the degree of content difficulty, (b) differentiation of the delivery medium, and (c) differentiation of directions and support materials. Cultural relevance is demonstrated by the application of our shared definition and the movement away from a superficial focus on food, fashion, and festivals. The ability to design lessons responsive to English language learners represents the third objective and is demonstrated by activities such as word walls and simple identification of key terms.

Before candidates were required to meet these objectives, it was essential that the faculty had a full understanding of the process. Several meetings were dedicated to providing specific examples of how these objectives would be incorporated into the methods classes. The instructor for the math methods course took the lead and shared several model lessons created. Faculty members were invited to observe candidates present the lessons created for the assessment of this competency.

### **Conclusion**

The program redesign is a continuous process. There is a need to continue to meet to review ways that the program can be improved. The biggest challenge is finding sites that are models of culturally responsive teaching in collaborative settings. Whereas sufficient sites have been found where the classes represent the demographics described earlier and have special education teachers supporting students with IEPs in the classrooms, the special education teachers sometimes express concern that they are not fully included as collaborative partners with the classroom teachers. Teacher candidates are entering field experiences with the aim of becoming change agents, but are working with experienced teachers who, while expressing a willingness to move towards a collaborative model, have often not yet made this transition.

Five factors emerged as critical components of changing and modifying curriculum:

1. It is critical that an institution has commitments from participating faculty as well as financial and personnel resources.
2. Time is the next biggest challenge. It is difficult to arrange all the necessary meetings and to schedule the time necessary for collaboration. This is a very time intensive process. Consider transforming your curricula prior to an accreditation visit when faculty members are engaged in similar efforts.



3. Professional development for teacher educators is necessary so they can learn new teaching concepts, approaches, and techniques.
4. Set a timeline for steps in the process and include a clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities.
5. Many faculty are comfortable in their current roles and prefer working in isolation rather than face new challenges and time commitments. Involve faculty members as much as possible in planning and decision-making to help foster the attitude of collaboration.

It was our experience that the individuals involved in this process wanted clear examples. Faculty members wanted to know what specific changes were needed to modify syllabi. We determined that requiring three new objectives and changing the format of the departmental lesson plan template were the best ways to get faculty started. Examples of syllabi were shared with faculty from other courses, which was critical in making the process transparent to all.

The most successful aspect of our work pertained to the reading methods course because it was a field-based course and all of the candidates attended the same school for their fieldwork. Teachers who were willing to ensure that our candidates were exposed to good models of collaborative teaching were selected. In contrast, in the math methods course, candidates produced excellent lessons in class, but the field placements did not offer consistent opportunities for practice.

Reflecting on this process and acknowledging that the final destination has not yet been reached, it is hoped that other teacher educators can use this experience as a framework for curricular change. The process in which we engaged, and continue to engage, is about transforming teacher education curricula into a collaborative and culturally responsive model. The research data support the rationale and legal requirements to move in this direction.

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