Preparing Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Special Educators: It "Does" Take a Village

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The preparation of culturally and linguistically responsive special educators requires planning, substantive collaboration, and valuing the perspectives of underrepresented groups. This article describes restructuring efforts of one special education preparation program that included coursework and field-based experiences designed to enhance candidates' understanding of the complex, dynamic interrelationships among culture, language, and disability as the basis for culturally and linguistically responsive practice. Major activities included identifying key competencies, aligning those competencies with specific coursework and activities, and working with faculty in general education to design opportunities for candidates in both programs to develop collaborative skills. Results of ongoing program evaluation indicate that efforts were successful based on positive responses from participating candidates, cooperating teachers who host them, and the principals who subsequently hire them. Successes, challenges, and future directions are discussed within the context of program design and delivery.

Keywords: special education teacher preparation, cultural and linguistic diversity

The Department of Special Education at The University of Texas at Austin (UT) has more than three decades of experience preparing teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). As reflected in the program's mission statement (Department of Special Education, 2008), an emphasis on preparing future special educators to effectively serve culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners and their families has been a long-standing priority. Courses designed to increase candidates' understanding of the influence of linguistic and cultural diversity on the delivery of special education programs and services have been expanded and enhanced over the last 30 years with leadership by the Multicultural/Bilingual Special Education Program faculty. During recent years, the undergraduate program has undergone major restructuring efforts to ensure that candidates enrolled in specially designed courses are provided with opportunities to develop and demonstrate the requisite knowledge and skills through carefully aligned university-based and field-based experiences with ongoing supervision and mentoring. This article describes the accomplishments, lessons learned, and challenges encountered as faculty utilized federal resources to undertake this complex, and often daunting task.

Context

The University of Texas at Austin is a high performing, research institution located in a major metropolitan area. The student body includes over 50,000 undergraduate and graduate students representing the 50 states and over 100 countries (University of Texas at Austin, 2012). The College of Education houses five departments: Special Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Psychology, Educational Administration, and Kinesiology and Health Education. The college enrolls a diverse group of undergraduate students, 56% of whom are White, 23% Hispanic, 8% African American, and 8% Asian. Seventy percent of the students are female and 30% are male (The University of Texas at Austin, 2010).

The Department of Special Education offers a stand-alone certification program designed to prepare future educators to teach students with disabilities. Texas certifies all special educators as EC-12 generalists. Specialized certifications are available only for teachers of children who are deaf and hearing impaired or visually impaired (State Board for Educator Certification [SBEC], 2001). Therefore, the stand-alone program must prepare pre-service teachers to serve students with a wide range of disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21. Certification seekers complete a 127-hour Bachelor of Science degree program in Applied Learning and Development (ALD) with an academic specialization in Special Education (SPED). Upon completion, the majority of students obtain Texas Generic Special Education Certification (EC-12) along with Elementary Generalist Certification (EC-6), meet the requirements for highly qualified special education teachers, and begin their careers in Texas schools. Texas is a diverse state responsible for educating nearly five million students, of whom 60% are designated as economically disadvantaged (the state's term for students eligible for free/reduced price lunch). According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2011), 50% of Texas students are Hispanic, 31% White, 13% African American, and 6% other. Sixteen percent of Texas students are served in bilingual/ESL programs and 9% are served in special education programs.

Prior to beginning preparation in Special Education, candidates must complete the UT core curriculum and other coursework to meet requirements for the ALD degree. Following completion of these requirements, typically in the second semester of their sophomore year, candidates enroll in the undergraduate program in special education. This five-semester program utilizes a cohort model, enrolling 25 or fewer candidates. Once candidates become part of a cohort, they take no courses outside of their program (e.g., bilingual education, elementary generalist, secondary). The program of study for special education candidates is described in Table 1.

Table 1

Special Education Program Course Sequence by Semester

Foundations Block

ALD 322	Individual Differences
ALD 327	Sociocultural Influences on Learning
SED 376	Foundations and Issues in Special Education
SED 332	Field Experiences in Special Education
	88 hours of observation in six diverse special education placements

Professional Development Sequence (Semester One)

EDC 670EA	Reading Methods (Grades 1-8)
EDC 670EB	Language Arts Methods (Grades 1-8)
EDC 331E	School Organization and Classroom Management
ALD 328	Applied Human Learning: Foundations of Positive Behavioral Supports and Classroom Management
	224 hours of internship in a general education classroom

Professional Development Sequence (Semester Two)

ALD 326	Language of Children With and Without Disabilities
SED 378E	Advanced Early Childhood Intervention
SED 378D	Assessment Practices in Autism and Developmental Disabilities
SED 378S	Teaching Individuals with Autism and Developmental Disabilities
	112 hours of internship in an early childhood special education classroom
	112 hours of internship in a classroom for students with autism or other developmental disabilities

Professional Development Sequence (Semester Three)

SED 375C	Teaching Individuals with Mild/Moderate Disabilities
SED 378R	Reading Difficulties with Diverse Populations
EDC 370E	Mathematics Methods (Grades 1-8)
SED 372	Assessment of Individuals with Mild/Moderate Disabilities
	224 hours of internship in a resource/inclusion classroom that serves students with mild/moderate disabilities

Professional Development Sequence (Semester Four)

SED 337	Intercultural Communication and Collaboration
SED 960	Apprenticeship: Research to Practice
	600 hours of student teaching in a special education setting for students with autism or other developmental disabilities

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Program Redesign

The redesign of our special education program was initiated through Project RISE (Restructuring Instruction in Special Education), a five-year federally funded project by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. This project, which began in 2007, is designed to examine and enhance the quality of the undergraduate special education teacher preparation program at UT. The major program goal is improvement in the preparation of pre-service

teachers to serve CLD students with disabilities. To accomplish this goal, Project RISE faculty and staff revised the existing Pre-service Knowledge and Skills Matrix to include linguistic and cultural competencies to become responsive special educators. Next, these competencies were aligned with specific course content, and all course activities were reviewed and enhanced. Third, course-related and field-based projects were designed to strengthen the development of these competencies. Finally, in collaboration with the Monarch Center (www.monarchcenter.org, 2010), program faculty, together with colleagues in general education teacher preparation programs, designed the Collaborative Intervention Project (CIP). This project focused on the development of collaboration skills for pre-service teachers who share responsibility for serving students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Project efforts were guided by formative and ongoing program evaluation activities.

Project RISE served as the catalyst for substantive program change. Faculty members responsible for implementation are integrally involved in college administrative committees and their multiple roles have enhanced communication and highlighted project accomplishments. For example, the fourth author is chair of the Department of Special Education, Project RISE Co-Principal Investigator and serves on the Dean's Management Team which represents the administrative decision making structure for the college. The Applied Learning and Development Committee oversees the design and implementation of numerous teacher certification programs, including special education. As a department representative to the committee, the first author similarly serves as a liaison between the project and the college administration. The project also established an advisory committee including college administration, faculty representing the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and local school district personnel. This group reviewed program evaluation results from all teacher preparation programs offered in the college and reached consensus on the need for increasing pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills in cultural and linguistic diversity and collaboration. Most importantly, selected tenure-track faculty and long-term clinical and adjunct faculty in the department supported the development of the program, continued improvement of the undergraduate program, ensured that program revisions were implemented with fidelity, and evaluated progress regularly and consistently. Faculty in Curriculum and Instruction with interest in the collaboration component of the project contributed substantively to the design and implementation of the CIP. These supports have been invaluable in accomplishing project objectives and institutionalizing the changes that have been made to date.

Matrix Revisions

Faculty began by conducting a substantive review of the literature and defining the "Highly Qualified" competencies and culturally responsive practices needed by special educators. Research on the multicultural preparation of special education teachers is scant (Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008) and recommendations are similar to those found in the multicultural general education literature. The results of this review and the current national and state standards were incorporated into the Matrix of Pre-service Special Education Knowledge and Skills requirements. Next, project faculty collaboratively identified specific competencies to be mastered during the five-semester program. Once the matrix was completed, the competencies required to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities were highlighted, and a second matrix emerged that guided subsequent restructuring that focused

specifically on this program component. This curriculum is guided by a socio-cultural theoretical framework as the foundation for developing pre-service candidates' cultural understanding (Hollins, 2008; Rogoff, 2003), using a "culture-general" (etic) approach to intercultural communication competence (García, 2012; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Hollins, 2008; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). A more detailed description of the curriculum follows in the course overviews below.

Mapping Standards to Syllabi

Mapping standards to syllabi is a critical component of effective programming. Faculty mapped competencies identified in the matrix to specific courses and assignments used to assess mastery of specific competencies. To quote one faculty member, "although I didn't want to do this (just because it's a daunting task), it really did help me to see the intent of [my] course and actual continuity/discontinuity in the readings, activities, products, and evaluations." If a competency was identified as a major focus in a given course, then the syllabus specified the assignment where candidates needed to demonstrate that knowledge and/or skill. Below is an example from the most recent syllabus for *ALD 327*, *Sociocultural Influences on [Teaching and] Learning* that will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.

A course goal is specified, followed by the specific foci linked to CEC and SBEC standards (identified in parenthesis below).

> **Goal 4:** *Critically examine how identities, beliefs, teaching styles, and educational philosophy influence teacher-student interactions, approaches to instruction, and achievement outcomes for students from diverse cultural and linguistic communities.*
>> **G4-1:** Ways specific cultures are negatively stereotyped and the impact of deficit views on students and their families. CC5K9
>> **G4-2:** Personal cultural biases and differences that affect ones teaching and the ways in which those factors influence the behavior of individuals with exceptional learning needs. CC5K4 (7.1K, 10.4K), CC9K1 (2.2K)

Aligning CLD Content Across Courses

Over the past five years, Project RISE supported the successful design and implementation of the two-course sequence that lays the foundation for cultural and linguistic understanding and promotes application in the classroom. An overview of these courses is descried below:

Developing candidates' sociocultural understanding. During their Foundations Block semester, candidates enroll in *ALD 327 Sociocultural Influences on [Teaching and] Learning*. All UT undergraduates are required to successfully complete at least one course that addresses cultural diversity in the United States. This course fulfills that requirement and is mandatory for all teacher education candidates in the college. Special education candidates, however, are enrolled in a special section of this course, which is aligned with CEC and Texas special education certification competencies and coordinated with activities across courses in the Foundations Block semester.

Course overview. A major goal of *ALD 327* is to develop candidates' understanding of the complex, dynamic interrelationships among culture, language and disability, and a culturally and linguistically responsive practice. Candidates acquire critical knowledge and skills that enable them to build cultural self-awareness and intercultural competence[1]. In this course, candidates deepen their understanding of the cultural contexts of human development through the study of cultural variability (e.g., sociocultural sources of identity, distribution of power, communication style), identity formation, family systems, socialization practices, and the culture of schools. Additionally, the socio-political contexts of difference, through analyses of stereotyping, bias and discrimination, power and privilege, bilingualism, second language acquisition, and dialectal differences are explored. Throughout the course these topics are related to the cultural foundations of special education law and practice, culturally responsive practices in identification, assessment, instruction and behavior management, and school-family partnerships.

Activities and assignments. The instructional goals and learning outcomes of *ALD 327* are best served in an experiential course design, with a high level of active participation and group interactions during each session. Activities for increasing cultural awareness (of self and others) include simulations, critical incidents, and analysis of video-based scenarios (Fowler & Mumford, 1995). Candidates work in small and large group formats to respond to activities and to debrief their reactions. In addition, they develop a series of autobiographical reflections focused on their cultural worldviews, the formation of their identities, and the development of communication styles. These personal reflections provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge related to goal G4-2 as described in the section above. A community-based project connects their formal, academic learning to their field experiences in *SED 332* (see Table 1), and provides opportunities for candidates to engage in dialogue with a member of a different socio-cultural community than their own, or with a teacher who serves CLD students in general or special education. In effect, the course design aims to create a learning environment in which candidates will experience intercultural communication and explore implications for their future professional practice with CLD learners, families, and communities.

Application during student teaching. In their final semester, students enroll in *SED 337 Intercultural Communication and Collaboration* in conjunction with student teaching. Pairing the courses in this manner provides opportunities for guided practice and application of the candidate's theoretical knowledge in the classroom. Due to the heavy demands associated with student teaching, *SED 337* has been recently re-structured into an intensive format at the beginning of the semester. Candidates begin attending class the week prior to the beginning of the semester, with the majority of class meetings completed by the third week of the term. For the remainder of the semester, candidates complete *SED 337* assignments in their student teaching setting and receive feedback from the instructor via Blackboard and email communication. Face-to-face meetings are also held to provide additional feedback and guidance as needed.

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[1]For this course, and throughout the program, culture is defined as "a learned meaning system that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meanings, and symbols that are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 16).

Course overview. Building on concepts taught in *ALD 327, SED 337* emphasizes the development of inclusive special education practices for students with disabilities from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic communities, and it examines successful collaboration with families and other educators to ensure appropriate services to all students. Candidates explore the implications of their socio-cultural, racial, and linguistic identities on their instructional practice, and develop reflective, inquiry-based teaching practices within a culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical framework. Additionally, they increase their understanding of the principles of intercultural communication, collaboration, problem solving, and conflict management. Lastly, candidates complete assignments that promote application of this knowledge in the classroom. These experiences are designed to enhance their ability to develop and implement culturally and linguistically responsive interventions and services, and to collaborate with families, other teachers, paraeducators, and related service professionals.

Activities and assignments. The format of all *SED 337* class meetings and assignments reflects the goals of the course to foster an inquiry-based, reflective practice that supports learning for all students (Hollins, 2008). Inquiry-based activities include analyses of readings from the professional literature, as well as assignments focused on personalized learning through two dialogue projects—one with a family member of a student in their classroom, and the second with a paraeducator. As part of lesson planning activities, candidates maintain a series of reflection logs, through which they demonstrate how they are utilizing new knowledge to analyze and select appropriate instructional strategies and materials, manage the classroom environment, develop social skills, and collaborate with family members, paraeducators, and other professionals. During their total teaching assignment (typically three weeks), candidates submit weekly teaching self-evaluations that respond to a series of planning-implementation-reflection-planning prompts corresponding with an inquiry-based model of critical, reflexive teaching (Hollins, 2008; Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Zimmerman, 2009). This process is initially limited to two students in the student teaching classroom, who serve as focus students for these assignments. Limiting attention to fewer students allows candidates to experience the process in greater depth. Once candidates acquire these skills, they are typically able to generalize these activities to other students in the classroom.

A second major thrust of the course is collaboration with other professionals and families. Key concepts related to the collaboration and communication process, include teaming, problem solving, conflict management, and working with paraeducators (Dettmer, Thurston, Knackendoffel, & Dyck, 2009; Friend & Cook, 2010). A major assignment is the Collaborative Intervention Project is described below. A final, cumulative reflective essay at the end of the semester documents candidates' perceptions of their learning and growth as culturally and linguistically responsive special educators. Typically, candidates are given the option of writing a more traditional reflective essay, or developing a concept map to depict their growth.

Collaboration. Teacher candidates develop collaborative skills by working in teams with candidates in bilingual education (in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction). Together, they plan academic and social behavioral interventions for English language learners in the bilingual classroom who are struggling or who are receiving special education services. An all-day seminar at the beginning of the semester serves as a preliminary orientation to the Collaborative Intervention Project (CIP), and is followed by two additional meetings over the

semester. The focus of the seminars is to bring the groups together to provide structure and guidance for the development of the intervention plans, and to monitor progress, respectively. Intervention plans are jointly developed and maintained on Google Docs, which allows instructors access to these documents, and it facilitates feedback and communication. In addition, CIP teams communicate with each other and with instructors using text, email, Google Docs, Skype, and face-to-face meetings.

Formative and Summative Program Evaluation

The overarching goal of the project is to improve the quality of the high-incidence special education undergraduate teacher preparation program, ensuring that future special education program graduates are well prepared to serve ever-increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse children and youth with disabilities. To guide program modifications, participant feedback is gathered at regular intervals throughout the program and following the first year of teaching. In this section we summarize sources and types of data gathered as part of the program evaluation, followed by project outcomes and a discussion of the ways these findings have been used to guide program modifications.

Data Sources Guiding Program Modifications

Following implementation of the revised program sequence, which began Spring 2010, feedback was gathered from special education teacher candidates, cooperating teachers who host interns and teacher candidates, and principals who hire program graduates. Special education candidates participate in focus groups at the end of the Foundations Block and each semester of the Professional Development Sequence (PDS) (see Table 1). Candidates are asked to respond to three questions regarding their preparation across 16 topical areas. The questions are: (1) What activities or experiences in the program have resulted in you being well prepared in this area? (2) What content do you feel you need to explore in greater depth? And (3) If there was one thing you could change about your preparation in this area, what would it be? Candidates are asked to rate their preparation in elementary education, secondary education, legislation/regulations, professional and ethical practice, understanding of specific disabilities, effective instructional practices, research-based practices, classroom management, home-school collaboration, professional collaboration, working with CLD students, differentiated instruction, assessment and progress monitoring, Response to Intervention, and assistive and instructional technology. Additionally, candidates are asked to respond to the three questions as they pertain to each semester's experience as a whole. At the end of the student teaching semester, participants are asked to consider the entire special education pre-service preparation program.

Surveys are sent to cooperating teachers at the end of each semester. Surveys are also sent to principals who hire program graduates at the end of the first year of their employment as full-time teachers. Both cooperating teachers and principals are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree that program participants/graduates (i.e., pre-service and first-year teachers) demonstrated knowledge and skills across the following 12 domains: (1) effective instructional practices, (2) age/grade level appropriate practices, (3) issues of cultural and linguistic diversity, (4) strategies for assessment and continuous progress monitoring, (5) use of assessment data in differentiating instruction, (6) methods for positively and proactively managing student behavior,

(7) Response to Intervention and its implementation, (8) appropriate practices for students with disabilities in a specific setting, (9) legal requirements and professional responsibilities associated with serving students with disabilities, (10) appropriate use of assistive and instructional technology, (11) collaboration with paraprofessionals/colleagues, and (12) home/school collaboration.

Results of Formative and Summative Evaluation Activities

Information gathered from the data sources presented below was used to guide continued program revision activities.

Focus groups. Program participants are convened at the end of each semester to respond to a set of three questions applied to 16 topics (as described above). Based on formative feedback gathered from the focus groups, four primary areas of concern led to the following program modifications. First, candidates wanted more infusion of multicultural content in all courses, as well as better alignment of content in the two multicultural courses. Project staff modified the matrix to more carefully sequence content in the two courses and established a working group to address the infusion of multicultural content into all special education courses. Second, candidates indicated that content related to diversity should be taught earlier, both in the program sequence and during their student teaching semester. As a result, the second author and doctoral students in Multicultural Special Education realigned course content across *ALD 327* and *SED 337*, and redesigned *SED 337* to be taught intensively during the first month of the semester. Third, candidates expressed the need for more preparation to work with paraprofessionals. This was addressed by including additional information on professional collaboration in two courses, and adding the paraeducator dialogue project in *SED 337*. Finally, the self-evaluation forms that candidates complete after teaching a lesson were cumbersome and needed to focus on salient features of their teaching. These forms were modified accordingly and updated to include the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners; and they were recently piloted.

Cooperating teacher feedback. To date, cooperating teacher survey responses have been analyzed for five consecutive semesters: Spring 2010, Fall 2010, Spring 2011, Fall 2011, and Spring 2012. The mean rating of cooperating teachers' (CTs) survey responses in aggregate was 3.4 on a scale of 1 to 4, indicating overwhelming agreement among cooperating teachers that program participants are generally competent across the 12 domains. Disaggregated by semester, the survey data showed that the CTs rated the interns as increasingly competent as they progressed through the program (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Cooperating Teachers and Hiring Principals Mean Ratings of
Program Participants Across Domains*

	Cooperating Teachers' Mean Ratings				Principals' Ratings			
	Intern I F '10, '11 (*n*=18)	Intern II S '10, '11, '12 (*n*=67)	Intern III F '10, '11 (*n*=17)	Student Teachers S '10, '11, '12 (*n*=23)	2010 (*n*=5)	2011 (*n*=4)	2012 (*n*=7)	Mean Ratings
Effective instructional practices	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.6	**3.6**
Age/grade level appropriate practices	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.7	3.6	3.5	3.4	**3.5**
Issues of cultural and linguistic diversity	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.4	3.8	3.4	**3.5**
Strategies for assessment and continuous progress monitoring	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.3	3.4	**3.4**
Use of assessment data in differentiating instruction	2.8	3.5	3.3	3.5	3.6	4.0	3.6	**3.7**
Methods for positively and pro-actively managing student behavior	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.4	3.8	3.3	**3.5**
Response to Intervention and its implementation	2.8	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.4	**3.4**
Appropriate practices for students with disabilities in this setting	3.2	3.6	3.6	3.9	3.8	3.5	3.4	**3.6**
Legal requirements and professional responsibilities associated with serving students with disabilities	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.6	**3.6**
Appropriate use of assistive and instructional technology	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.0	3.5	3.5	**3.3**
Collaboration with para-professionals/ colleagues	3.7	3.4	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.4	**3.6**
Home/school collaboration	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.8	3.4	**3.5**

Note: Responses are on a 4-point scale: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly agree.

Mean ratings of 3.5 and higher for any given domain indicate strong agreement with respect to interns' knowledge and skill. For interns in their first semester, two of the 12 domains were rated 3.5 or higher on average. As those interns completed their second semester, the number of domains for which CTs strongly agree they are knowledgeable increased to four, then to six at the end of the third semester, and to nine at the completion of student teaching (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of Categories for which Cooperating Teachers' Mean Ratings of Intern Competencies were 3.5 or Higher (Strongly Agree).
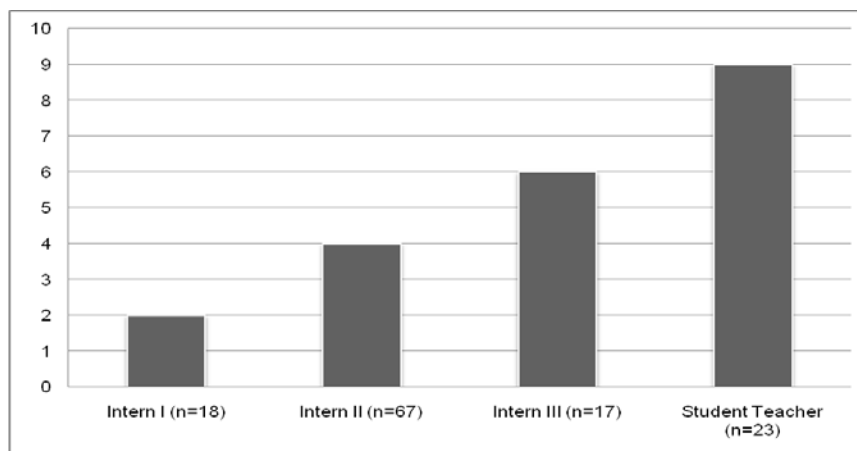
Note. Data are based on 2010 and 2011 cohorts and numbers reflect the numbers of CT surveys received and not necessarily the numbers of interns. Intern IIs each have two CTs, one for their early childhood placement and one for their autism and developmental disabilities placement, so more surveys were collected from CTs of intern IIs than from any of the other internship semesters for which each intern had one CT.

Table 2 also summarized areas of relative program strengths and opportunities for improvement through a comparison of mean ratings for each domain over time as cohorts matriculated through the program and began their professional careers. As evaluated by their CTs, Interns I (semester one program participants) received the highest ratings on effective instructional practices and collaboration with paraprofessionals and colleagues. Interns II (second semester program participants) were rated highly on effective instructional practices, issues (e.g., understanding) of cultural and linguistic diversity, strategies for assessment and continuous progress monitoring, use of assessment data in differentiating instruction, and appropriate practices for students with disabilities in this setting. Interns III (third semester program participants) continued to receive high ratings in common with Interns II and additionally on legal requirements and collaboration with professionals. Finally, student teachers (fourth semester program participants) received ratings higher than 3.5 in every category except management of student behavior, response-to-intervention, and the appropriate use of assistive and instructional technology. Areas of opportunity for growth are identified as those categories receiving mean ratings of less than 3.0. The only instances where this occurred were for Interns I in use of assessment data in differentiating instruction and response-to-intervention and its implementation. These findings were perplexing given the first semester internship is in a general education setting where these components would be of critical importance.

Improvement is also evident when comparing successive PDS cohorts (see Table 3). Cooperating teachers' ratings of the knowledge of Interns I and III were compared from Fall 2010 to Fall 2011, while ratings for Interns II and student teachers were compared for three successive years (Spring 2010, 2011, and 2012) over 12 domains. For each domain, mean ratings of 3 or 4 (agree or strongly agree) were calculated and compared across years. For Interns I, improvement was evident between Fall 2010 and Fall 2011 for seven of the 12 domains. For Interns II, improvement was evident for six domains across years. Interns III improved in four domains, and student teachers in seven.   Improvement across years is evident for each group of interns with the exception of Interns II between 2011 and 2012. This may be influenced by the fact that an unusually small cohort of students was enrolled in 2011. Improvement over time is noted in several categories, including age/grade level appropriate practices, methods for managing student behavior, response to intervention (RtI), and collaboration. Categories that received consistently high levels of agreement include effective instructional practices, issues of cultural and linguistic diversity, strategies for assessment and progress monitoring, use of assessment data in differentiating instruction, and appropriate practices for students with disabilities.

Principal feedback. Principal feedback was collected, recorded, and analyzed for three consecutive years, and at the end of the 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012 school years. Principals who hired program graduates as first-year teachers were asked to rate those teachers on their knowledge of each domain similar to the cooperating teachers. Overall, principals agreed that program graduates demonstrated the targeted knowledge. Mean responses ranged from 3.0 to 4.0, and the mean overall rating was 3.5. Nine of the 12 domains could be considered areas of relative program strength, receiving mean ratings of 3.5 and above. These included all of the domains except strategies for assessment and continuous progress monitoring, RtI and its implementation, and the appropriate use of assistive and instructional technology, all of which received mean ratings of 3.3-3.4.

Accomplishments, Challenges, and Next Steps

Ongoing evaluation efforts have yielded information that indicates that the program is adjusting to successfully meet the needs of participating candidates. Focus group meetings continue to be conducted at the end of each semester and further program adjustments are anticipated as results are analyzed. Our candidates' growth across the 12 domains, particularly in the areas of diversity and collaboration, are well documented by the ratings received from cooperating teachers as well as employing principals. These data also indicate that competence increases as candidates matriculate through the program. This feedback suggests that program redesign efforts through Project RISE have created more systematic linkages of content across courses and increased graduates ability to implement culturally and linguistically responsive practice.

Despite these successes, much remains to be done. For example during PDS I, candidates' competence in RtI and differentiation of instruction received the lowest rating. Ratings in RtI continue to remain fairly low throughout the program and employing principals' mean ratings is 3.4 in this area. Given the importance of RtI and differentiation in addressing the needs of CLD learners, program faculty will continue to explore the reasons for this relative weakness and efforts will be made to strengthen these program components. Since candidates are completing

Table 3

*Percentage of Cooperating Teachers Who Assigned 3 (agree) or 4 (strongly agree)
in Rating Pre-service Teachers' Competence across 12 Domains*

	PDS I		PDS II - FLS/A-DD			PDS II - PPCD			PDS III		Student Teacher		
	Fall '10 (n=9)	Fall '11 (n=9)	Spring '10 (n=10)	Spring '11 (n=8)	Spring '12 (n=16)	Spring '10 (n=12)	Spring '11 (n=2)	Spring '12 (n=20)	Fall 10' (n=12)	Fall '11 (n=5)	Spring '10 (n=5)	Spring '11 (n=11)	Spring '12 (n=7)
Effective instructional practices	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Age/grade level appropriate practices	100%	100%	86%	100%	94%	92%	100%	100%	92%	100%	80%	100%	100%
Issues of cultural and linguistic diversity	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	92%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Strategies for assessment and continuous progress monitoring	78%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Use of assessment data in differentiating instruction	78%	89%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	92%	80%	100%	100%	100%
Methods for positively and proactively managing student behavior	88%	100%	71%	100%	94%	92%	100%	95%	92%	80%	80%	100%	100%
Response to Intervention and its implementation	66%	67%	57%	60%	88%	50%	100%	100%	58%	80%	80%	100%	100%
Appropriate practices for students with disabilities in this setting	77%	66%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Legal requirements and professional responsibilities associated with serving students with disabilities	88%	66%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%	100%	90%
Appropriate use of assistive and instructional technology	56%	77%	71%	100%	93%	92%	100%	80%	83%	80%	80%	91%	100%
Collaboration with parapro-fessionals/colleagues	89%	100%	86%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	83%	80%	100%	91%	100%
Home/school collaboration	77%	100%	100%	60%	100%	92%	100%	100%	67%	80%	100%	91%	100%

their first semester of internship and just beginning their methods courses, it may be premature to expect them to demonstrate high levels of competence during PDS I. The department maintains a state-of-the art assistive and instructional technology lab. Candidates visit the lab each semester of the PDS and are expected to utilize technology extensively in their field placements. Ratings in this area indicate that more needs to be done and careful attention must be given to assignments requiring utilization of assistive and instructional technology during fieldwork. Continued efforts will be made to develop preservice teachers' competence in positively and proactively managing student behavior with an emphasis on culturally responsive behavior management.

Now that two courses have been designed to lay the foundation for cultural and linguistic understanding, the next step is to integrate diversity-related concepts and skills across the three semesters between the Foundations Block and student teaching. This will require the involvement of faculty who teach these courses to compare existing syllabi with the matrix to identify opportunities for readings, activities, and assignments that will deepen candidates' understanding of the relevance of diversity across all domains. In effect, our goal is to shift faculty and candidate views of culturally responsive teaching from an add-on competency to an inclusive, equity-oriented framework of special education that situates *all* learning within its socio-cultural and linguistic contexts.

Another area of future activities will be to increase collaboration between faculty in the departments of special education and curriculum and instruction. Although the collaborative intervention projects (refined and implemented with the Monarch Center support) have been successful in fostering interactions between general and special educators, there is a continuing need for deeper and broader connections for both groups. For example, such interactions would promote a clearer understanding of general education candidates about their roles in RtI as well as inclusive special education services, while simultaneously building parallel skills for SED candidates related to collaboration and teamwork. Just as the CIP project has been institutionalized in the SED curriculum, efforts are needed to integrate and institutionalize these components in the general education teacher education curriculum.

Preparing pre-service special educators to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities is an often-espoused priority among teacher education programs. Professional literature, national and state standards, and the nation's changing demography highlight the importance of this focus. It has become an explicit priority in federal funding for personnel preparation programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), including Project RISE. However, accomplishing this objective is no simple task. Although the literature is clear about the importance of infusing diversity content throughout the program (Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006), implementation efforts have been difficult to sustain due to a linear approach to problem solving, and a focus on a single-course rather than the transformation of the teacher education program (Trent et al., 2008). As a result, content related to diversity may rely on the commitment of individual faculty, or is "infused" in less than substantive ways. Our experience with Project RISE suggests that both approaches are important but must be intertwined for optimal results. That is, core concepts related to diversity—including the development of cultural self-awareness—require intensive and focused attention that can only be provided through specialized courses, but these competencies must be systematically infused across the program if

candidates are to become highly skilled in culturally and linguistically responsive practice. Ultimately, a continued commitment of institutional resources and faculty development are needed to achieve equity and social justice for all students with disabilities.

AUTHOR NOTES

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