Teachers for Inclusive, Diverse Urban Settings

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Introduction

Students and teachers in urban settings nationwide face a variety of challenges associated with low income communities, including high crime rates and disproportionately high exposure to environmental health hazards. Schools in impoverished communities receive substantially less funding than schools in affluent communities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008), and these funding gaps are associated with disparities in access to technology, science labs, and textbooks. Many urban schools serve English learner populations as well. The "wide and persistent achievement disparities between these English learners and English proficient students show clearly that schools must address the language, literacy, and academic needs of English learners more effectively" (Calderon, Slavin & Sanchez, 2011, p. 103). The trend toward greater diversity has been labeled a "race-ethnic transformation" of American society, with the emergence of race-ethnic minorities as the majority population occurring most rapidly among children (Hernan-

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dez, Denton, & Blanchard, 2011, p. 104). The inclusion of children with a range of disabilities broadens the scope of diversity transformation. This transformation has enormous implications not only for the existing teaching force but also for the preparation of future teachers.

Indeed, nationally, 61% of students with disabilities are instructed in general education classrooms 80% or more of the time (USDOE, 2015). Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education reports that 81% of youth ages 6-21 that receive special education services under IDEA spend 40% or more of their time in the regular classroom. Thus, general education teachers are increasingly responsible for educating students with disabilities. However, general education teachers often feel that they do not have proper training, adequate planning time, administrative support, or knowledge of policies regarding students with disabilities (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Parasuram, 2006). These teachers often lack the skills necessary to enable students with disabilities to access the general education curriculum in inclusive settings (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002). At many universities, separate preparation of special education and general education teachers has been the norm

In this article we discuss the creation of an Urban Dual Credential Program (UDCP) at a large, comprehensive state university in California, a program meant to prepare dually certified teachers in general education (California Multiple Subject Credential) and special education (California Education Specialist Credential in mild/moderate disabilities) to work with and meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, including those with special needs, in urban settings. In California alone, according to December 2012 figures, approximately 700,000 of California's school-age population were identified with a disability, and of these children, 73% were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CBEDS, 2014). Through coursework and clinical practice in local elementary school sites, participating candidates in the UDCP acquire the knowledge and skills to implement research-based, culturally responsive, and inclusive instructional practices, specifically multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS; See National Center for Intensive Intervention; http://www.intensiveintervention.org/ncii-glossary-terms#MTSS). Our focus here is on the design of language arts methods courses in the program.

Inclusive Education in Diverse, Urban Settings

Inclusion is defined as a "place where students with disabilities are valued and active participants and where they are provided supports needed to succeed in the academic, social, and extra-curricular activi-

ties of the school" (McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, & Algozzine, 2014, p. 4). Research has documented the advantages of inclusive classroom settings for students with and without disabilities. Nutbrown and Clough (2009) and Sayeski (2009) concluded that students with special needs who are integrated into the general education setting demonstrate heightened self-esteem and increased socialization skills. The collaborative efforts of both the general and special education teachers heighten classroom expectations for all students. General education students are more accepting of their peers with disabilities because the inclusive environment creates a sense of social and cultural awareness, which precipitates tolerance and patience towards students with disabilities (Mastropieri, Scruggs, & Berkley, 2007). Additionally, teacher attitudes about inclusion are more positive and roles and responsibilities between the special education teacher and the general education teacher are more clearly defined, resulting in academic success and improved social skills for both the students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Biddle, 2006; Ryan, 2009; Titone, 2005).

The creation of effective inclusive education in urban schools often takes place in settings in which the performance of English learners, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, and students of color lags behind that of their mainstream peers and is often associated with low expectations on the part of teachers. When race, language, and special needs intersect, results can be particularly devastating, as demonstrated in Dávila's (2015) qualitative study documenting the microaggressions experienced on a regular basis by high school Latina/o students with special needs. One response to this problem is the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching and learning nurtures and utilizes student strengths in a culturally supported, learner-centered context to promote student achievement (Gay, 2000). Furthermore, it is a critical framework for reducing the disproportionality of CLD students in special education (Klingner et al., 2005).

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) is a framework that is increasingly being used to meet the needs of all students in inclusive schools. MTSS is situated in the premise that high quality, evidence based instruction aligned to standards along with early intervention and ongoing progress monitoring helps schools meet the needs of students who have academic and social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (Batsche, 2013). MTSS envisions a tiered approach to meeting students' needs, in which Tier 1—the general education classroom—is the site for core, universal instruction and supports; culturally responsive pedagogy and differentiated instruction for English learners are included in Tier 1. Targeted supplemental supports are provided in Tier 2 and intensive interventions in Tier 3 (Gamm et al., 2012). MTSS is

thought of as an umbrella that encompasses both Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) in a common system that includes a school-wide support network outside of the classroom as well. RtI is a tiered model of support typically used for academics, particularly in the area of reading/language arts. PBIS is a tiered model of support for behavior and social-emotional needs. In this comprehensive framework, struggling learners are identified early, and the school mobilizes its resources to provide needed interventions and make data-based instructional decisions about student progress.

How might programs that prepare general education teachers, and faculty who teach language arts methods course within those programs, go about creating courses that address such challenges? In this article we share how the College of Education in a large, public, urban university in California is doing so through the development of a clinically based dual credential program that prepares teachers for culturally responsive teaching in inclusive settings (the urban Dual Credential program, UDCP). Program development has taken place in a policy setting in which current initiatives, including the Local Control Funding Formula, the State Systemic Improvement Plan, the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and upcoming changes to teacher preparation credentialing standards, all align to create a unique opportunity to engage in transformational work in education (CalSTAT, 2015a). We believe that this case study is an example of collaboration in teacher preparation in a relationship that, in the words of Pugach et al., 2011) "moves beyond the traditional duality of special and general education" (p. 195). We also believe that it is critical for practicing teachers to understand the ways that credential programs are changing, so that as they mentor new teachers, and as they continue their educational trajectories, they are aware of innovations that help teachers help create inclusive classrooms.

The guiding questions addressed here include:

1. How is MTSS used as a framework for course development and teacher candidate experience in the dual credential program?

2. What disciplinary frameworks and philosophical assumptions were challenged in the process of program design?

3. To what extent have district, school, and community perspectives been part of the planning and decision-making process?

Using MTSS to Reimagine Methods Courses

The UDCP is a two-year program that can be taken as the final two years of an undergraduate pathway to teacher certification with a BA

in Liberal Studies, or as a postbaccalaureate program leading to dual credentialing. Half of the coursework is taken from existing credential programs, and half was redesigned for the UDCP. For example, for mathematics instruction, we retained our current math methods course for Tier 1 instruction, and added a course on targeted and intensive math interventions for Tier 2 and 3. Our literacy methods courses, on the other hand, required a different approach.

In the current multiple subject credential program, teacher candidates take a reading methods course that is based heavily on areas identified in the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000)—phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, fluency, text comprehension, and vocabulary—and geared to passing of the state reading instruction exam. They take a second language arts methods course that includes oral and written language instruction and English language development, as well as addressing instruction of visual and performing arts. Reading interventions are covered separately in special education coursework. Most current credentialed teacher readers will be familiar with similar divisions of curricular content from their own programs.

In order to prepare our candidates to work effectively and collaboratively in K-8 settings, we used MTSS as a guiding framework for curriculum development in the UDCP. After developing a set of program goals, an initial task for the interdepartmental team was reviewing state standards for our multiple subject (elementary education) and education specialist (special education) credentials, looking for areas of overlap between the two programs. We then examined current courses in the two credential programs to determine which courses could be retained in the new program with little revision, which would be combined, and which areas would need new courses to be developed.

For example, to rethink and design literacy instruction the UDCP program, we used an MTSS framework that aligned with the conceptualization of literacy found in the Common Core State Standards. This includes a focus on informational text as well as literature; an integration of listening, speaking and writing with reading, standard English conventions and progressive language skills by grade; and foundational reading skills. In the redesigned curriculum for UDCP, teacher candidates now take a Tier 1 literacy course (integrating reading, writing, and oral language) in their first semester, followed by a Tier 2/3 literacy course focusing on reading foundations interventions in the second semester. Teacher candidates learn about what the reading and writing process is and about how such process will be different for students with a disability and for English learners. These two literacy courses are also the focus of the clinical experience for the first year in the program. In their

classroom-based fieldwork, teacher candidates practice instructional strategies working with large groups, small groups, and individual students. Once a week during fieldwork and after each lesson taught, teacher candidates share their experiences and reflections with their peers and instructors.

Just as co-teaching is a feature of many inclusive classroom settings, where general education and special education teachers utilize a variety of delivery models to enhance instruction of all students, co-teaching has been built into the literacy methods courses in UDCP. Both the Tier 1 and the Tier 2/Tier 3 courses are team taught by general education faculty and special education faculty. The co-teaching model provides teacher candidates with opportunities to be exposed to various perspectives and approaches to instruction and intervention. Additionally, Teacher candidates witness how collaboration between a general education instructor and a special education instructor has the potential to enhance students' learning experiences, and they then apply these learnings as they conduct small group instruction and interventions in collaboration with classroom master teachers.

Challenging Philosophical Assumptions/ Developing Shared Understandings

The UDCP planning team consisted of four faculty members (two general education and two special education), two department chairs (of Liberal Studies and Teacher Education, each with a multiple subject instruction background), and an associate dean (a faculty member with special education expertise). General education faculty had expertise in areas of English learner instruction and literacy instruction; special education faculty had expertise in positive behavior supports, assessment, MTSS, and instruction of students with mild/moderate disabilities. Pugach et al. (2011) refer to the deeply embedded separation between special and general education as "a separation that will have to be fundamentally bridged if serious reform is to take place" (p. 195). Even when such work is undertaken in a collegial atmosphere of mutual respect, co-planning often involved reaching across disciplinary divides to come to common understandings of teaching and learning and appreciating perspectives of the other discipline. For instance, the term "general education" used to refer to one of the faculty groups is more commonly used in special education settings and is not typically used among general education teachers themselves.

One of the areas of intense dialogue was that of appropriate and effective instruction of English learners. Special educators and researchers

use the term "accommodation" to refer to those strategies that enable students with disabilities to perform learning and assessment tasks that they might not otherwise be able to do, and federal law requires their use when necessary (Luke & Schwartz, 2007). English learners, the majority of whom are not students with disabilities, also require instructional accommodations (often referred to as "sheltered instruction"), and researchers concur that instructional accommodations for English learners that include both English language development instruction as well as academic content instruction are or should be part of Tier 1 instruction (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Orosco, 2010). Interventions are targeted, skill-building strategies typically offered to few students with diagnosed need at Tiers 2 and 3. While EL/special education experts are explicit in using the term "ELL interventions" to refer to those English learners who are struggling and require additional, targeted instruction (e.g., Rivera, Moughamian, Lesaux, & Francis, 2008), it is not uncommon for practitioners to refer to English language development as an intervention. Zaretsky (2005) contends that "whether they recognize it or not, many educational professionals, including school administrators, have traditionally worked from a medical model of disability" (p. 69). Application of this model, with its implicit assumptions of the normal and abnormal, of ability and disability, to English language learners—intentionally or not—is problematic. As general education classroom teachers and special education teachers are increasingly called upon to work together in inclusive settings, continuing dialogue to develop shared understandings of the varying and multiple needs of students and how to address these is essential.

Collaborations with School and District

An essential element of the UDCP experience for teacher candidates is the fact that the university courses take place in and are embedded in elementary school sites. From the first semester of the program, teacher candidates carry out carefully structured instructional activities in participating classrooms, and participate in *instructional rounds* (NCATE, 2010) that enable them to observe their peers in action and provide reflection and feedback. Essential to this model is close collaboration with school site leaders and teachers. For example, teacher candidates observe practicing teachers during the language arts block, and then during the literacy course time is set aside to debrief about these observations. The faculty from the literacy courses also observe in classroom, so that there is shared experience, and deep connections to the content being taught can be made.

UDCP sites are located in two school districts with a history of collaboration with the College of Education. These are sites that have participated in research and professional development projects, have served as sites for cohorts of teachers to participate in the MA programs in Curriculum and Instruction, Math Education, and Dual Language Development, and have hosted student teachers in both general and special education classrooms. Site administrators participated in the development of selection criteria for master teachers and were responsible for their recruitment. Master teachers collaborated with faculty in identifying the instructional objectives and interventions that teacher candidates would be implementing in their classrooms.

In addition to co-planning the program design and implementation, district and site administrators and teachers participated with university faculty and UDCP students in joint professional development. For example, educational specialist staff in one of the districts provided professional development on assistive technology in which a variety of technology tools and devices were demonstrated. District leaders and faculty attended biannual professional development (PD) sessions in which technical support and guidance in dual certification program development was provided by the CEEDAR Center (www.ceedar.org). Together school district partners and our faculty also visited an inclusive school site where Universal Design for Learning and inclusion of students with and without disabilities were seamlessly embedded. These PD sessions contributed to the development of an ethic in which both the university and district partners were invested in the UDCP and its outcomes. UDCP is thus modeled on urban clinical programs that weave education theory and classroom practice tightly together in a two year-long model of clinical practice and student teaching, not only fostering collaboration but also serving to promote school change (Berry et al., 2008).

Conclusion

Our purpose in this article was to describe how teacher preparation at one California public university is being transformed to prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student population, specifically culturally and linguistically diverse students and students with disabilities. Designing and implementing this program in collaboration with our district partners and embedded in urban classrooms has the potential to impact changes in the schools in which our master teachers and our teacher candidates work. We are very proud of this program and the fundamental changes that we have made in how we prepare teachers in this program. We recognize that these changes

were not natural nor easy, necessitating faculty to collaborate with colleagues across traditionally "siloed" Departments in the College of Education. This collaboration was facilitated by the shared vision and commitment of participating faculty to effectively prepare educators to teach all students in inclusive settings (CalSTAT, 2015b).

As we move forward we are very cognizant of making sure we are preparing effective teacher candidates who have strong pedagogical and content knowledge as well as key dispositions to work with ALL students. We want to be cautious that we do not underprepare our candidates to have the needed content knowledge required of general education teachers or underprepare the needed instructional precision of education specialists. Over time as we evaluate this program, particularly the blended literacy and math courses and co-teaching models, we will make changes to better meet our candidates' needs and the needs of the schools and districts where they will be teaching. We will also be able to examine if this type of teacher preparation does prepare a "different" type of teacher who can truly meet the needs of the diverse urban learners they will be serving.

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