

Development and Design of a Merged Secondary and Special Education Teacher Preparation Program

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I want to be able to teach health to every student that comes into my classroom, can you teach me to do that? (SDEP Health Education Applicant).

Public schools, spurred by federal education reform (NCLB, IDEA 2004), strive to increase the performance of all students through standards, accountability, inclusive classrooms, access to the general education curriculum, and providing teachers qualified in the subjects they teach. As middle and secondary classrooms become increasingly inclusive, some special educators may not be prepared to teach content (Brouk, 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2005), and some general educators may not be prepared to address diverse learning needs (McClanahan, 2008; Ness, 2008). This mismatch between the reality of today's schools and traditional teacher preparation (Hardman, 2009) has led to the development of new models for

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teacher education that integrate or merge special education and general education. Teacher education programs fall into three categories: discrete, integrated, or merged (Blanton & Pugach, 2007). Most teacher preparation is provided via the discrete model of separate general and special education programs. Recently professional organizations have questioned whether discrete programs adequately prepare either special or general education teachers for today's schools (Blanton & Pugach, 2007).

Integrated and merged models are two approaches to combining special and general education pedagogy for teacher education. In an integrated model, separate general and special education licensure programs are retained but faculty work together to develop a set of courses and/or field experiences in which special education candidates learn about general education curriculum and instruction and vice-versa. Elementary and/or secondary education and special education programs are coordinated in such a way that candidates can readily add special education licensure to their general education licensure (see for examples Dieker & Berb, 2002; Hardeman, 2009; VanLaarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, & Rouse, 2007). In merged programs, faculty in general and special education collaborate to develop one program in which all candidates receive licensure in both general and special education. Merged programs are developed through the extensive and deliberate collaboration of general and special education faculty to redesign the teacher education curriculum and field experiences. However, while several merged programs have been developed to prepare elementary candidates, programs for middle/secondary candidates are scarce (Griffin & Pugach, 2007).

When faculty from Curriculum and Instruction and Special Education consider creating a merged secondary program, many questions and issues arise. For example, what varied concerns do faculty members from these respective departments have regarding the preparation of secondary educators and can those concerns be addressed in one merged program? Coming from different disciplines, faculty may have misconceptions about one another's views of learning and pedagogy (Robinson & Buly, 2007) and if so, how will these be clarified and resolved? How do faculty members reach a shared vision of what teacher candidates need to know and be able to do in order to be effective in today's diverse, inclusive classrooms? Once reached, how is that vision translated into coherent curriculum and field experiences, that are hallmarks of quality teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005)? How can teacher candidates gain a depth of knowledge and experience in content-specific pedagogy (Shulman, 1987) along with instructional strategies for teaching the full range of adolescent learners? How can field experiences be designed so that candidates can teach and collaborate across general and special education? How do faculty coordinate the many facets of program delivery across university departments? And finally, how will faculty learn from the early years of implementation and improve upon the initial design? These questions were addressed in the development and implementation of the Secondary Dual Educator's

Program (SDEP). This article describes the process used by cross-department faculty to develop the program design and components and how program evaluation led to revisions that strengthened the program.

Collaborative Program Development

Impetus for Program Development

In 2004, three secondary education faculty members from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and four faculty members from the Special Education Department began discussing their concerns about secondary teacher preparation. Curriculum and Instruction faculty described the need for teacher candidates to be adequately prepared to teach students with the range of learning needs found in secondary classrooms, and in particular, how to support struggling readers and English Language Learners (ELL). Graduates of the secondary education program had asked faculty: “Why wasn’t I prepared to work with students with special needs?” One faculty member shared her own experiences as a new teacher:

I am haunted by the image of a young adolescent boy with tears running down his face as his mother screamed at him for failing my course. He was reading at second grade level but I had no idea how to differentiate the curriculum for him. As a first year teacher, I had had no preparation in how to reach students with special needs in my classroom. He failed in my class because I had failed him. I want teacher candidates who graduate from this program to know how to reach all their students. (Faculty member in Curriculum and Instruction)

Special education faculty discussed the need for their teacher candidates to receive more content area preparation in order to serve as co-teachers/consultants in general education classrooms or to teach content to students in other settings. Graduates of the special education program asked: “Why didn’t we learn more about the general education curriculum?” These concerns were also reflected in the literature, as cited above. Surveys conducted with secondary teacher candidates in the discrete general education and special education programs revealed that a significant number would have been interested in a merged secondary program if it had been available.

Finding Common Ground

The group of cross-departmental faculty agreed to meet on a voluntary basis over a period of twelve months to develop a proposal for a merged secondary program. Since 1997, the Graduate School of Education has offered a merged elementary education and special education licensure program with a master’s degree preparing over 150 teachers. The Inclusive Elementary Educators Program (IEEP) has its own curriculum of merged pedagogy with field experiences in inclusive classrooms. Although the merged secondary program would need to be very different, the IEEP model served as a starting point for discussing possible program designs. Faculty met on their own time, sometimes on campus, sometimes in one another’s homes.

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They established ground rules for working together (e.g., all team members have equal say, all ideas are worth hearing) that cultivated collegial relationships across departmental lines. To make the most effective use of time and effort, meetings were preplanned, efficient, carefully documented, and adeptly facilitated. The initial meetings were conducted using the PATH Planning process (O'Brien, Pearpoint, & Kahn, 2010) to support faculty in envisioning the ideal merged secondary program. Faculty shared values, theoretical perspectives, pedagogy, research-based practices, competencies, knowledge, skills, and dispositions vital for secondary special educators and secondary content area teachers respectively.

Setting aside the two discrete teacher education models, they created a collective vision of a merged secondary program. In tandem with this process, faculty visited administrators in seven local school districts' to share the program design and to solicit their input. Administrators said they need both special education and content teachers who have specific strategies to support struggling readers within their content classrooms. They also emphasized the need for culturally sensitive pedagogy and strategies for teaching English language learners. For example one administrator said: "Especially in reading, teacher candidates need the diagnostic and prescriptive tools for working with struggling readers. They need to know to confer with folks in the building who can help. In a general education classroom they need to know how to differentiate." As a result of this collaborative process, faculty developed the following purpose and goals for the program.

Figure 1 **Goals for the Preparation of Graduates of the SDEP Program**

The overall purpose of SDEP is to develop strategic teachers with the versatility to meet the learning needs of all secondary students.

The goals of SDEP are to prepare teachers who are able to:

1. Teach from a strong content knowledge foundation utilizing specialized methods for teaching the content area.
2. Differentiate units, lessons and assessments for a diverse range of learners.
3. Accommodate the needs of diverse students within inclusive classrooms.
4. Teach reading to struggling readers and support reading comprehension in content areas.
5. Initiate collaborative planning, assessment and problem solving with students, teachers, educational assistants, and parents.
6. Implement co-planning and co-teaching methods to strengthen content acquisition of individuals with learning challenges.
7. Adapt unit and lesson plans for students with diverse needs, and for students with varying cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds.
8. Use classroom management and positive behavior supports strategies.
9. Understand assessment and instruction for individuals with significant disabilities.
10. Become change agents and leaders for responsible inclusion.

Purpose and Goals of the Program

The overall purpose of SDEP is to develop strategic teachers with the versatility to meet the learning needs of all secondary students. The faculty identified what they wanted graduates of the program to be able to do (as shown in Figure 1).

Merging Special and Secondary Teacher Education

Once a shared vision and program goals were developed, the faculty team engaged in a curricular mapping process to examine and then merge the separate programs in a way that would achieve these goals and meet licensure requirements in special and secondary education. The various standards and competencies (e.g., INTASC, CEC, State of Oregon teacher standards), the content and skills, the key assignments and performance measures in each of the separate programs were mapped out and fully described. Then, the team identified where these elements were redundant or unique. This process resulted in a working draft of the scope and sequence of the new program's courses and field experiences. After several revisions, the team had a road map of the pedagogy they would merge in the program.

Curricula Coherence

Exceptional teacher education programs provide teacher candidates with a coherent curriculum delineating the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to teach effectively (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In order to achieve this goal, faculty decided to learn and use tools from the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (<http://www.ku-crl.org>) to map and organize the critical content and the connections between courses, field experiences, performance assessments, and the outcomes sought for candidates from quarter to quarter. These efforts also helped faculty map out how content and skills taught in one quarter would serve as an effective scaffold for the next quarter; allowing candidates to develop increased levels of competency over time.

Faculty used a shared format for course organizers as they developed syllabi. Later, during program implementation, the faculty continued to meet before each quarter to review how content, course outcomes, and key assignments fit into the big picture. Together, they created a grid that linked critical concepts, course objectives and assignments for each quarter, serving as a planning device and an informational organizer for all members of the learning community (faculty, teacher candidates, mentor teachers, and supervisors). An adjunct instructor and supervisor reported that the program and course organizers helped her ensure that her teaching and supervision was relevant and consistent with the program goals and that: "This level of collaboration is very unusual and mirrors exactly what we hope our students will be able to do with their colleagues as they begin their careers in schools." After gaining university approval, SDEP was then reviewed and approved by the Oregon Teaching Standards and Practices Commission in 2005. The first cohort of 28 teacher candidates began 2006 winter quarter. In the program description below, the current program is presented.

Program Description

SDEP is a full-time two-year graduate program culminating in licensure as a secondary educator in a content area, with authorization to teach mid-level and/or high school, secondary special education, and a Masters in Education (M.Ed.) degree. In the first year, candidates attend fall, winter, spring quarters and then have a two-month summer break. The second year begins with a one-month course that coincides with the start of the K-12 school year followed by the final fall, winter, and spring quarters. Compared with the university's single-licensure/master's programs in secondary education or in special education, SDEP is one quarter longer, including one additional student teaching experience. In this section, the program prerequisites, admission process and how candidates receive preparation in content-specific pedagogy are described. This is followed by a quarter-by-quarter description of the program in order to highlight the developmental progression of learning experiences provided to candidates.

Prerequisites and Admissions Process

Before applicants can apply to the graduate teacher education program, they must build a strong foundation in their content area through undergraduate coursework. As undergraduates, prospective applicants identify the content area in which they wish to teach and either complete an undergraduate major in that subject, or add to their existing degree a set of courses, ranging from 24 to 60 quarter hours, established by the University Teacher Education Committee as foundational subject matter preparation. Applicants must have a 3.0 or better overall grade average, pass the Praxis II content exam in their subject area and complete a course in human development. The admission process also includes evaluation of writing samples, review of applicants' previous experience, three recommendations, and a simulation activity with other applicants in which they collaboratively design curriculum for a diverse group of students. A faculty panel observes the simulation looking for evidence of applicant's collaborative skills. Approximately 25 candidates are selected via this admissions process every other year, forming a cohort that completes the program together.

Preparation in Content-Specific Pedagogy

Each SDEP cohort includes teacher candidates from a variety of content areas. While in SDEP, candidates build upon their undergraduate subject matter preparation by completing two graduate-level content-specific methods courses. To complete these courses, they leave the SDEP cohort and join candidates from the secondary general education cohorts who are also preparing in the same content area. These courses offer concentrated study of current curriculum and methodology (Shulman, 1987) in art, business education, English, health, mathematics, foreign languages, music, physical education, science, social science, speech, and theater arts. Through these courses all secondary candidates investigate the problems and

methods in selecting and organizing materials for instruction, including integration of literacy and technology in their content area. Additionally SDEP candidates combine their content-specific pedagogy with a process for differentiating assessment, planning, and instruction learned in SDEP. A cooperating art teacher provided one example of how an SDEP student teacher reflected this merged preparation:

[Due to] her experience in special education, she is constantly looking at students and doing continual assessments. She spends her day seeing what's coming in from the kids, and what's coming out. At the same time, she also has the depth in art. Lots of time when teachers just have special education training, they cannot talk about more than just what's in the textbook. She knows her subject matter, with or without a textbook. (Cooperating teacher)

First Quarter

The coursework and field experiences in the first academic year are shown in Figure 2. The first quarter builds a foundation for development of secondary dual educators. The intentional development of a professional collaborative mindset begins with teacher candidates acting as observers and participants in both the general and special education systems. Through a series of courses, seminars, and field assignments in middle and high school classrooms, teacher candidates examine the full range of development, ability, race, class, culture and linguistic diversity among adolescent learners. Using interviews, surveys, and observations,

Figure 2
Course Sequence and Field Experience Schedule
for First Year of the Secondary Dual Educators' Program

Fall	Winter	Spring
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adolescent Learners in Inclusive Settings• Adolescents with Learning Differences• Multicultural & Urban Education• Inclusive Classroom Researcher• Collaborative teaming & the special education process (co-taught)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study Skills & Learning Strategies• Advocacy & Transition Planning• Behavior Management• Classroom-based Assessment• Instructional Methods: Literacy Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diagnostic Assessment• Seminar I: Work Sample Support• Instructional Methods: Math and Content Area Instruction
3-term Placement at the Middle or High School Level		
Initial Field Experience (co-taught) (10 hours each week in a school)	Practicum: Supervised Teaching Experience (10 hours each week in a school)	Student Teaching in Special Education (20 hours each week in a school)

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each candidate creates a learning profile chart of students with a range of abilities and cultural backgrounds identifying implications for instruction. These are tools candidates will later employ in differentiated planning.

Teacher candidates continue to build their knowledge about adolescents with learning differences through the creation of a shared library of online resource files regarding various exceptionalities. They learn how to access research literature, and identify research-based practices. Coursework guides these candidates to comprehend the intent of special education law, the collaborative development of individualized education plans (IEP), and the need for teachers who can bridge the worlds of special education and general education. Through a key assignment, they accompany a student with an IEP as well as a student who is an English Language Learner for a day. Teacher candidates see the difficulty these students can experience navigating public middle and high schools. With this new lens, candidates deepen their empathy for students with learning differences while gaining a sense of urgency for professional collaboration.

Second Quarter

During the second quarter, teacher candidates learn to systematically assess student performance and implement research-based instruction, with an emphasis on literacy. Strategy instruction for improving reading comprehension, the writing process, note taking, and other study skills are introduced and implemented with students in supervised field experiences. Candidates also teach research-based literacy instruction to individual students and learn how classroom-based assessment guides instructional decision-making. They observe and participate in providing accommodations for students with learning differences. Through their coursework and teaching experiences, candidates begin to build a toolbox of assessment and instructional strategies important for differentiation and supporting struggling readers in content area instruction.

In this way, the SDEP program is sequenced so that candidates can first gain initial competence in these strategies before they are expected to use them in a process of differentiated planning and instruction later in the program. Graduates report they continue to use the strategies taught. For instance, a middle school science teacher shared: “SDEP helped me with the current focus on improving literacy skills. My students do not understand the textbooks, so direct instruction of reading and writing skills is necessary.” Another graduate working as a middle school social studies teacher said: “I use scaffolding, notes, graphic organizers, and audio tapes to support reading in class.” Other topics are also addressed in the second quarter. Candidates learn how school-wide systems, e.g., Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) are used to support students. The identity development and self-advocacy of adolescent learners are explored through work with individual students as candidates establish partnerships with community resources in support of transition to adult life.

Third Quarter

In the third quarter teacher candidates student teach as special educators. Focusing on literacy intervention, teacher candidates use the strategies learned in the prior quarter in assessment, planning, and instruction to complete a formal work sample, working with a small group of students needing reading interventions. Concurrent with student teaching, candidates continue coursework in assessment, instruction, and collaboration. They learn how to administer diagnostic assessments and implement methods for teaching math to students with learning difficulties. As part of student teaching, they collaborate with classroom teachers and other instructional specialists.

One-Month Course and Fourth Quarter

As shown in Figure 3, the second half of the program begins with a month of course and field work that coincides with the beginning of the public school year followed by three academic quarters. Candidates assume the role of content area

Figure 3
Course Sequence and Field Experience Schedule
for Second Year of the Secondary Dual Educators' Program

Summer (one month)	Fall	Winter	Spring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional Planning for Inclusive Classrooms (co-taught) • Seminar II: Work Sample development (co-taught) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content-specific Secondary Methods • Classroom Management • Effective Teaching Strategies and Materials for Working with Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced Content-specific Pedagogy • Seminar III: Job Readiness • Collaborative Teaching (co-taught) • Functional Assessment and Curriculum • Specialized Techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive Educational Research & Leadership (co-taught)
3-term Placement at the Middle or High School Level			
Students report to fall placements in late August	Student Teaching in an inclusive content-area classroom (co-taught) (20 hours each week in a school)	Field experience in content area classroom and in special education with focus on student with significant disabilities (20+ hours each week in a school)	Student Teaching in an inclusive content-area classroom (co-taught seminar) (Full-time experience in Inclusive setting)

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teacher, ready to apply their understanding of students with learning differences. Candidates approach the task of teaching large groups of diverse learners with a strong commitment to collaboration and inclusion. This is the first opportunity for teacher candidates to employ the concepts of universal design, differentiation, literacy supports for struggling readers, strategy instruction, and content enhancements to inclusive content instruction.

Beginning with the month-long course, cross-departmental faculty co-teach a process for instruction and planning that merges special and general education pedagogy. In the field, candidates use a differentiated planning process that involves gathering and analyzing information about the diverse learners in their content area classrooms and applying that information to design differentiated objectives, instruction, and assessments (Lenz & Deshler, 2004; Tomlinson, 2001). They develop formative assessment tools to inform their ongoing instructional decisions. Candidates also complete courses in content-specific pedagogy, strategies to support English language learners, and classroom management. During a half-time student teaching experience, candidates apply the knowledge and skills from these courses into the second formal work sample. An SDEP graduate teaching English wrote:

I can differentiate better than most other English teachers, who are struggling to include students with IEPs. I don't retrofit curriculum, but rather make a plan that includes everyone. We have a lot of ELL students and children living in poverty. My training has made it easier for me to understand how to value this diversity of students. (SDEP graduate)

Fifth Quarter

In the fifth quarter, candidates continue their preparation for content area instruction and also engage in coursework and field experiences with students with significant disabilities in the school. Teacher candidates assess individual students with significant disabilities and implement functional skill instruction, thus completing the final requirements for Oregon's special educator licensure. Simultaneously, teacher candidates take a second and more advanced course in their content pedagogy while continuing to work in inclusive content classrooms. In reference to this preparation, one graduate said: "SDEP taught me how to help students with disabilities [in my classes]. I have learned how to teach without taking content away." Also in this quarter a collaborative teaching course is co-taught by secondary and special education faculty that prepares candidates to work with different co-teaching partners (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals, students) and participate in an authentic co-teaching experience in their field placements.

These experiences appear to influence graduates' collaborative practice. Principals who hired SDEP graduates as content area teachers reported they knew how to use and guide instructional assistants in their class. One graduate working as a special educator talked about co-teaching with content area teachers:

You come out of this program as new teachers with a different mindset. I'm helping teachers since I've been here like the teacher I co-teach with who is retiring this year. She said to me "You have taught me so much this year that I wish I had known in my first year of teaching."

Sixth Quarter

The last quarter of the program is the culminating experience for teacher candidates to apply and reflect upon the full set of skills practiced throughout the program. Candidates complete a full-time student teaching experience in a content-area inclusive classroom. The bar is set higher for their third and final work sample. Inclusive practices such as, the development of learning profiles, differentiation, formative assessment, collaboration, literacy instruction and supports, and research-based practices should be overtly evident. Teacher candidates complete this final student teaching experience with the commitment to teach and support literacy so that all students can access critical content. Candidates disaggregate and examine the learning outcomes of all students in their classes, self-evaluate their instruction in relation to those outcomes, and present/discuss what they have learned. One SDEP teacher candidate wrote: "...my best experience in the program was seeing the results from my post-test during a very academically challenging unit. All of my students showed learning gains...." The importance of collaboration is re-emphasized as candidates partner with special educators, ESL specialists, counselors, and other support personnel in response to student needs.

As the capstone experience for their Masters in Education (M.Ed), candidates revisit the research-base that underlies the teaching practices they have learned and complete action research projects in their student teaching placements. Faculty and candidates discuss what it means to become effective change agents for responsible inclusion and social justice. Candidates envision themselves as becoming teacher leaders in the future who successfully collaborate, conduct inquiry, and share their knowledge to empower all students. Thus, the courage to change, one of the most important attributes of inclusive secondary educators (Kozik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, & Black, 2009), is a value embedded throughout SDEP. A supervisor reflected on candidates futures:

I see [SDEP candidates] as being potential change agents in 2-5 years. They are primed to be leaders because they are more aware of the big picture. SDEP graduates have more of the pieces, such as: ELL, content, special education, team work, how you have to accommodate to meet students' needs. A general education teacher will take several years to develop the same perspective.

Another supervisor commented: "the SDEP program may create teachers who take the lead in promoting high expectations for all students and not just writing off students with special needs." A principal observed that during meetings a SDEP graduate "advocates for and provides examples of how to help all students reach the standard. She speaks up about accommodations and wants to have forethought

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before teaching, not just on the spot remediation. Aligning curriculum in our English department now includes differentiation.” Another graduate described a collaborative leadership experience in her first years of teaching:

When I was hired our high school was tracked by academic ability...my SDEP perspective and knowledge of the law helped me advocate for detracking during our Professional Learning Community meetings. Through collaborative research and data collection, we teachers convinced the administration to phase out the [lowest level].

Important Components of the Merged Secondary Program

Several components of SDEP have been important to establishing a merged secondary program. These include collaborative leadership and administrative support, preparation for teaching the full range of students with disabilities, school district partnerships and field experiences, and aligning performance assessments with program goals.

Collaborative Leadership and Administrative Support

Collaborative leadership is the core of SDEP, whose faculty invest the time to understand one another’s approaches to teaching and learning. The program is led and managed by co-cohort leaders from special education and secondary general education who are committed to striving for a common goal, parity, and mutual respect (Friend & Cook, 2009). The cohort leaders meet weekly and have two day work retreats quarterly to coordinate myriad aspects of the program. Together SDEP cohort leaders establish partnerships with school districts for field placements, advise students, consult with faculty and supervisors, and monitor students’ progress. Each quarter, the cohort leaders co-teach a seminar linking program goals, field experiences, key assignments and courses in instructional planning and collaborative teaching. Cohort leaders seek university supervisors with experience in both content area teaching and special education. Together, they implement a program evaluation process and revise/improve the program as needed.

In our experience, several administrative supports were vital to implementing a merged program. Most importantly, the dean strongly endorsed the creation of a merged secondary teacher licensure program. Although resources are not available to pay full workload credits for co-teaching courses, faculty work assignments are arranged to enable collaboration. Two curriculum and instruction secondary faculty and one special education faculty were assigned to be a three-person team of cohort leaders for the first two program cycles. Thereafter, one secondary and one special education faculty serve as co-cohort leaders. Funding was provided to allow core faculty to attend workshops in content enhancement (University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, <http://www.ku-crl.org>), design new courses, and recruit

prospective applicants. After the first two years, a cross-departmental governance council was established to oversee the program, consisting of the chairs of curriculum and instruction and special education, as well as the two associate deans.

Preparing Candidates to Teach a Full Range of Students with Disabilities

The special education component of merged programs is sometimes limited to experience with students with mild and moderate disabilities and does not include students with significant disabilities (Blanton & Pugach, 2007). Merged programs may offer multiple options to candidates who wish to prepare for working with students with more significant disabilities (Pugach & Blanton, 2009). In Oregon, special educator licensure is non-categorical and spans the full range of disabilities (other than students with visual or hearing impairments). Thus, all special educators learn to teach students with mild through significant disabilities. Although the emphasis in SDEP is preparing to teach students with no or mild disabilities, SDEP candidates complete coursework and field experiences in assessment and instruction for students with significant disabilities. Candidates develop and teach an individualized functional skills program embedded in natural school routines. In addition, transition, advocacy, and self-determination for the full range of students with disabilities are addressed in a separate course. Candidates seeking additional knowledge are directed to courses in the special education department, including an advanced series in teaching students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Partnerships with School Districts and Field Experiences

From the beginning stages of development, SDEP faculty collaborated with school district partners to create placements that supported merged teacher preparation. When designing SDEP, faculty envisioned a content area teacher and a special educator in the same school serving as joint cooperating teachers over two or three quarters. Candidates could (1) observe the same adolescent's experiences in both special and general education classrooms, (2) assess and teach the same students from both the lens of a special educator and as a content area teacher, and (3) participate in collaboration and co-teaching. To date, a range of placements across multiple districts are used, such as placement across a self-contained special education classroom and content area classroom, to placement in a school implementing full to partial inclusion and varying degrees of co-teaching.

The cohort leaders and placement coordinator continue to seek appropriate field experiences and build a corps of SDEP graduates to mentor future teacher candidates. Initially school district partners were very interested in working with SDEP because graduates would be "NCLB highly qualified" special educators at the secondary level. As principals observed the candidates in content area classrooms, the advantages of content area teachers effectively prepared for inclusive classrooms became obvious. In particular, sometimes districts had implemented full inclusion without adequate professional development for veteran teachers in

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the areas of differentiation and universal design. When asked about the strengths of the SDEP graduates, one principal replied: “Differentiation. Basically she can break down the content for any kid who is struggling to learn.” Another said: “She can adapt her curriculum and modify for each kid. She really understands what they need.”

Performance Assessment That Reflects Program Goals

The key performance-based assessments in the SDEP are three formal work samples completed during student teaching experiences in the third, fourth, and sixth quarters of the program. As a reflection of the program goals, SDEP work samples consist of the following components: (1) description of the learning context and a learning profile of the specific students within the instructional group; (2) development of differentiated unit objectives and goals (aligned to IEPs and state standards) as a result of careful assessment of learning needs; (3) explicit inclusion of literacy strategies and technology; (4) development and implementation of pre/post assessment tools; (5) instructional plans that include daily reflection and regular progress monitoring; (6) data summary and analysis of learning gains; including disaggregation of learning outcomes; and (7) overall reflection of the teacher candidates’ learning.

A detailed scoring rubric has been developed for candidates, supervisors and cohort leaders to assess candidates’ work samples. After each student teaching experience, candidates complete a self assessment based on initial teaching competencies focused on SDEP’s target areas of differentiation, universal design, literacy, and professional collaboration. Mentor teachers and supervisors use a proficiency scoring guide to assess candidates’ progress towards program goals during their field experiences. Feedback is thus provided to candidates that specifically targets their areas of strength and areas for improvement. These assessments help faculty to identify where individual candidates need support or where the program needs revision.

Program Evaluation and Revision

Because faculty were merging preparation in secondary and special education for the first time, faculty wanted to evaluate and improve the program design as needed during the early program cycles. SDEP faculty implemented an evaluation plan to gather information from multiple sources and viewpoints regarding the effectiveness of SDEP in preparing teachers that reflected the program goals (Figure 1). Candidates and later graduates provided input through seminar discussions, focus groups, self-assessments, course evaluations, interviews, and exit and follow-up surveys. Supervisors provided feedback on the quality of field experiences. SDEP faculty analyzed candidate work samples and other assessments to determine if desired outcomes were in evidence. Administrators who hired graduates were interviewed. The full methods and results of the program evaluation is reported in Fullerton, Ruben, McBride, and

Bert (in review). After each two-year program cycle, the compiled evaluation data was used to guide program revisions before the next cycle.

During the first five years, the program evaluation described above led to a revision of the sequence of special and secondary content and field experiences. SDEP candidates complete three student teaching experiences; two in inclusive content area classes and one in special education. In the first program cycle, the special education experience was sandwiched between the two content area experiences. This sequence did not allow candidates sufficient time to gain proficiency in the component knowledge and skills needed before candidates were expected to differentiate in content area classes. Candidates expressed the desire to have those skills prior to student teaching in large diverse inclusive classrooms. This sequence is contrary to most collaborative teacher education programs which place general education program components first and special education second (see Blanton & Pugach, 2007, for examples), the logic being that candidates first need to know about general education before they can learn about special education.

The SDEP cycle was re-sequenced so that candidates spend three quarters learning and practicing component skills in assessment and instruction with individual and small groups of students with disabilities prior to their whole-class content area student teaching experiences. After this change cohort leaders and supervisors found improvement in candidates' use of differentiated planning, assessment, and instruction in their content area work samples. Supervisors reported observing more confidence and readiness for whole class instruction and differentiation:

Doing the special education field experience first made candidates aware of the whole class *and* of the students who had learning differences at both ends of the spectrum. They could see how to build differentiation into lesson planning right from the start...SDEP candidates always plan with accommodations in mind.
(Supervisor)

Another supervisor observed that after placing special education before the content area student teaching candidates had higher expectations for special education students in their content area class and knew what literacy support strategies to use to help them meet those expectations. One of the advantages of merged programs is being able to deconstruct the way general and special education programs teach the assessment/ planning/ instruction/ reflection cycle and then blend these into one process taught as a series of scaffolded learning experiences.

Being a special education student teacher first and a content area student teacher second may have benefitted candidates' development in other ways. It set the stage for candidates to initiate collaboration as a content area teacher. Once in the role of content area student teachers, candidates naturally took the time to consult more closely with the special educator. A supervisor reported that a cooperating teacher said his SDEP student teacher had gone to the special education department with a list of all students in her health classes. She included 504's and IEPs. He was

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impressed by this. He said had never done this in 20 years of teaching. Another supervisor commented:

All beginning teachers struggle with classroom management and we need to do something to embed it and practice it early on.... The SDEP model may make it easier for candidates to develop their classroom management because they start with a small group first and then move to whole class. (Supervisor)

Other supervisors felt that after the change, SDEP student teachers brought a broader repertoire of classroom management skills to their content area teaching experience and were more confident in their use of them. Thus, program evaluation that included ongoing input from candidates, graduates, supervisors, and faculty members resulted in program improvements.

Conclusion

After five years the quest to develop strategic teachers with the versatility to meet the learning needs of all secondary students continues. Next steps include: developing more field placements that support program goals, building a program portfolio of how candidates and graduates in different disciplines meld differentiation with subject-matter pedagogy, and documenting how principals have created hybrid positions to utilize SDEP graduates in school reform.

“...From the very first day new teachers walk into their classrooms, be it in high-performing or low-performing schools, in urban, rural, or suburban settings, they need to be ready to deliver high-quality education to every single student in the room.” (Miller, 2009, page 12). SDEP is one model for preparing candidates to meet the challenges of secondary teaching in a rapidly changing world. An evaluation of SDEP found that graduates developed competency in differentiation and collaboration (Fullerton et. al., in review). Our experience suggests that merging secondary and special education pedagogy into one coherent program that is co-led and co-taught can result in teachers with a different approach to and skill set for secondary teaching. A recent graduate teaching high school English reported “SDEP made it possible for me to envision my educational practice with students—not numbers—at the center. SDEP granted me the ability to see all students as exceptional.” As SDEP and other approaches to integrating or merging secondary teacher preparation are developed, research examining these new models and their ultimate impact on student achievement is needed.

Note

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