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Learning to Teach All Students: Integration and Inclusion in Undergraduate Teacher Education Programs

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Introduction

Our university will begin implementation of a newly revitalized Education Studies major (formerly Liberal Studies) in Fall 2019, beginning with in-coming freshmen. This is a 4.5-year integrated program, wherein candidates earn a baccalaureate degree and two preliminary credentials: Multiple Subject and Education Specialist. In four years, candidates earn a B.A. in Education Studies that incorporates an Elementary Subject Matter (ESM) program and preparation for a Multiple Subject credential. In an additional semester, candidates complete their preparation for the Education Specialist credential.

The Education Studies program incorporates subject matter content and professional preparation in a way that is integrated, connected, and concurrent. Candidates follow the same sequence of courses as a cohort. There is a balance between integrative seminar courses, content courses, general education courses, and professional preparation courses, including a concentration in Science. The goal of this program is to prepare candidates to teach all students with an intentional focus on teaching English learners and students with special needs through the lens of a social justice perspective.

Therefore, as the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) is currently considering a change in requirements so that all teacher candidates are prepared to teach all students and many universities are revising their Liberal Studies programs to meet the CTC's ESM program standards, the goal of this article is to describe the nature of a program that conceptualizes best practice for undergraduate teacher preparation programs in California.

Key Elements of Practice

The Education Studies program is an interdisciplinary major that prepares candidates to teach all students in elementary schools. The program integrates subject matter content and professional preparation in a way that is connected and concurrent. The CTC's Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs, 2016) and Multiple Subject and Education Specialist standards, pedagogy, subject matter content, and fieldwork in elementary schools are integrated throughout the program. Content courses are drawn from multiple disciplines and provide candidates with a deep understanding of the subject matter they will teach: Reading, Language & Literature; Mathematics; Science, History; Social Science; Visual & Performing Arts; & Human Development.

Integrative seminars are offered each semester of the program; the focus is on integrating concurrent content

courses and fieldwork with best pedagogy practices. The integrative seminars are cumulative with spiraling content, proficiencies, knowledge, and experiences. The seminars focus on meeting the needs of all students in the real world of elementary school classrooms, including all aspects of diverse student and family populations.

As a goal of this program is for candidates to be able to tailor their own teaching to focus on students' interests and varied levels of learning and abilities while assessing students' mastery of concepts in multiple ways, faculty embrace and model this style of teaching throughout the integrative seminars. This means that from their first semester in the program, candidates are engaged in the theory, curriculum, and practice of teaching and reaching all elementary school students through a social justice lens.

To begin building this social justice perspective, students are introduced to social justice domains and standards for K-12 students (Teaching Tolerance, 2016) in their freshmen year. These standards are organized into four domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action. The free, downloadable document produced by Teaching Tolerance outlines the standards through outcomes and scenarios by grade band: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

During their sophomore year, students develop a deeper understanding of the domains and learn to integrate grade-level social justice standards into basic lesson plans. By the end of the sophomore year, students write a research paper framed by one of these social justice standards. Candidates continue integrating social justice standards into lesson and unit plans throughout the program and frame their final signature work through this social justice lens.

Candidates observe and participate in fieldwork in local elementary schools each semester in the program, beginning in freshmen year, gradually becoming more intense as they progress through the program. Over the four years, candidates intentionally experience a variety of fieldwork settings, including: public and independent schools, schools serving only students with special needs, schools serving predominantly English learners, and schools with high-and low SES levels. Mentoring, advisement, and guided field experiences direct candidates toward successful completion of a 15-week student teaching placement at a public elementary school during the senior year.

A growing body of research indicates that preservice teachers benefit from university-school partnerships, specifically, strong relationships between teacher preparation programs and the elementary schools in which they observe and participate (e.g., Castle, Fox, & O'Hanlan Souder, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Michaels, 2015). Hence, candidates also participate in two lesson studies sessions in university-

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school partnership schools each semester. During a lesson study session, candidates observe, participate, and analyze model lessons in collaboration with elementary teachers and university instructors in classrooms serving diverse student populations. This culminates in senior year with a traditional lesson study model: student teachers collaboratively design a model lesson (that incorporates best practice in teaching English learners and students with special needs) and then observe a peer teaching the lesson at the student teaching school site.

In addition, candidates create a “Becoming a Teacher” professional website. The website’s framework is the 21st Century Skills (critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and information, media and technology), including the ability to purposefully integrate these skills into instruction to promote transferability to student learning (Urbani, Roshandel, Michaels, & Truesdell, 2017). Candidates graduate in four years with a B.A. and a Multiple Subject teacher credential.

During sophomore year, candidates may apply to the Education Specialist Master’s program. If accepted, candidates may begin taking Education Specialist coursework as an undergraduate and complete preparation for the Education Specialist credential in one more semester as a graduate student. Thus, the program strives to provide intellectual tools, professional experiences, and reflective conversations that enable candidates to make a difference as teachers in a diverse world.

Significance to the Field of Teacher Education

Implementation of the Education Studies major will begin in Fall 2019. Faculty will analyze the impact of this program on candidates’ knowledge and praxis and department enrollment following the first year of implementation. Currently, all graduates of our Liberal Studies program find employment in general education elementary school classrooms. The new 4.5-year Education Studies major will also prepare our candidates to teach in special education settings.

These types of programs may serve to ease the teacher shortage in California. In addition, a new CTC focus represents a shift away from silos of learning in teacher prepara-

tion programs, that is, a move to a collaborative approach to learning to teach all students in K-12 classrooms. A shared philosophy for our program is to empower all candidates with the “know how” to implement differentiated instruction for all students, and particularly for English language learners and students with special learning needs.

Faculty in our department agree that we want all candidates to have the skills necessary to effectively differentiate teaching and learning, and we recognize that in order to do this effectively, we must begin in the first semester in the program. We expect that our candidates will be more knowledgeable, skillful and confident in teaching all students, in particular addressing the learning needs of diverse learners.

Conclusions

Our goals for candidates are for them to tailor their own teaching to focus on students’ interests and varied levels of learning and abilities while assessing students’ mastery of concepts in multiple ways. We look forward to the implementation and analysis of this new way of thinking about undergraduate teacher preparation in California.

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