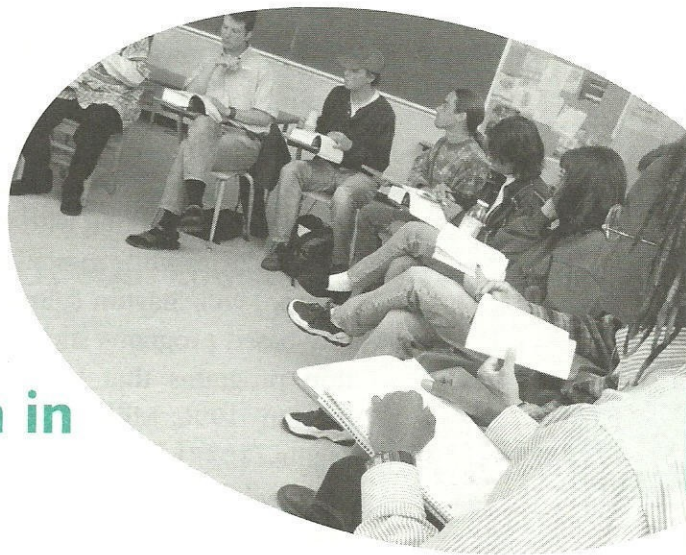


Chapter 3

Interdisciplinary and Interagency Collaboration in Personnel Preparation



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Introduction

The context for service delivery for young children with disabilities and their families has changed in recent years. Support by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for services in the least restrictive environment and natural environments and results of research have led to increased consensus that young children with disabilities should be served in the same settings as their typically-developing peers (Guralnick, 2001; Odom, 2000). These settings include, but are not limited to, the child's home, child care centers, Early Head Start, Head Start, public school programs, and community playgroups. The provision of services in inclusive settings further suggests that all professionals, including early childhood educators (ECE) and early childhood special educators (ECSE), who work in these settings must be prepared to implement developmentally and individually appropriate services for all children (Bricker, 2000). Some individuals assert that successful inclusion of children with diverse abilities will be most effective when personnel preparation programs are implemented in an inclusive model (Bredekamp, 1992; Burton, Hains, Hanline, McLean, & McCormick, 1992; Miller, 1992).

Policy and philosophy also support the significant role of families in early care and education, with the focus on involving families in a partnership via family-centered services (Dunst, 2000). Further, IDEA supports collaboration between disciplines and between professionals and families as members of teams. This shift from primarily direct delivery of services to children to more indirect delivery of services has implications for the role of early childhood educators. Not only must early childhood special educators possess the knowledge and skills to work with young children with disabilities, they

must also have the knowledge and skills to collaborate and consult with other professionals and families. The literature in personnel preparation further advocates that all professionals working with young children with disabilities should possess a core set of competencies while mastering their own discipline-specific competencies (McCollum & Thorp, 1988; Stayton & Bruder, 1999). Further, the interdisciplinary nature of community-based programs suggests that students should be prepared in personnel preparation programs that teach and model interdisciplinary approaches (McCollum & Stayton, 1996; Miller & Stayton, 1998; Rosenkoetter & Stayton, 1997). Winton and Mellin (1997) found that individuals who have opportunities to practice interdisciplinary collaboration in their preservice programs are more likely to participate in interdisciplinary roles in their careers. Thus, personnel preparation programs should include the theoretical and knowledge base of, as well as practical experiences in collaboration and consultation with, other disciplines (Stayton & Bruder, 1999; Stayton, Whittaker, Jones, & Kersting, 2001).

Two trends in the design and delivery of preservice personnel preparation programs have resulted from the change in service delivery to more inclusive settings and to the increased focus on collaboration with families and other professionals. First, numerous universities and colleges have developed unified curricula that combine all of the recommended personnel standards from ECE and ECSE (Miller & Stayton, 1998) in an effort to better prepare personnel to work with all young children. Further, they describe these programs as interdisciplinary in that an interdisciplinary team of faculty from two or more disciplines jointly plan, implement, and evaluate the program. Second, Kilgo and Bruder (1997) describe the development of interdisciplinary personnel preparation programs that include coursework, field experiences, and other preservice credit experiences for students from more than one professional discipline. These programs typically involve faculty and students from education, human services, and allied health disciplines in common courses and experiences.

Case Studies

The two case studies presented in this chapter provide practical examples of how the DEC personnel preparation recommended practices specific to learning activities that focus on interdisciplinary/interagency efforts (PP3–6, PP23, PP27) can be integrated into a preservice preparation program.

The first case study describes these practices as they are integrated into the Utah State University ECSE undergraduate certification program. This case study highlights strategies for integrating competencies related to collaboration and consultation within coursework and field experiences. In addition, various ways to involve family members in the preservice program are discussed.

The second case study describes the unified ECE program at the University of Northern Iowa. Sequencing of specific interdisciplinary and interagency activities within courses

and field experiences are shared with the reader. The case study also discusses coteaching by faculty and family members as a means to model collaboration.

Utah State University's Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Undergraduate Certification Program

Program Context and Demographics

The early childhood special education undergraduate certification program at Utah State University has been in operation since 1985. The program was developed to address the critical need for teachers of young children with disabilities and was supported by outside funding from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Until 2000, it remained the only undergraduate program in Utah certifying teachers to work in the ECSE field.

The Utah State Office of Education licenses teachers in the following way. The Level 1 (basic) certificate is issued to educators who are beginning their professional careers. It is valid for three years, but may be renewed one time. The Level 2 (standard certificate) is issued after satisfaction of all requirements for a Level 1 license and successful experience as an educator. The Level 2 license is valid for five years. Two special education certificates are issued in Utah: (1) the special education certificate licenses teachers to teach children kindergarten to twelfth grade, with endorsements in severe and mild/moderate; and (2) the special education (birth–age five) certificate is required for teachers of infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children with disabilities. Utah also issues an early childhood certificate for teachers of young children in kindergarten through grade three that is recommended for those teaching in formal programs for preschool ages.

Teachers who completed the special education (birth–age five) certification program on or before June 1, 1994, also have been recommended for the early intervention credential issued by the Utah Department of Health, the lead agency for providing birth to three services in Utah. There is no continuing education requirement for those with the Department of Health credential; however, in 1999, the State Office of Education imposed continuing education requirements for all active teachers. The educator must complete and document an individual program of professional development in which a minimum of 100 license points are earned through “participation in activities that contribute to competence, performance, and effectiveness in the education profession” (Utah State Office of Education, 2001). These activities range from enrolling in university courses, completing an independent study activity, or participating in district inservice.

Utah State University is located in Logan, Utah, a small town set in a mountain valley about 85 miles northeast of Salt Lake City, with a population of approximately 100,000. Utah is the eleventh largest state geographically, and the majority of its population is centralized along the western front of the Wasatch Mountains along a line from Provo,

60 miles south of Salt Lake City, to Ogden, 45 miles north of Salt Lake City. Only one other university in the state, the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, offers training for those who wish to certify in early childhood special education. Until 2000, the University of Utah certified only at the master's degree level. Thus, access to programs that provide early childhood special education is limited.

The Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation at Utah State University currently admits 15–20 students annually in the early childhood certification on-campus program. Fifty students have graduated in the past seven years of the program (1993–2000). In addition to the campus-based program, a distance education program delivers the early childhood special education certification courses over the Utah interactive television network to rural and remote areas throughout the state. Admission and graduation requirements for the distance education program are the same as those for

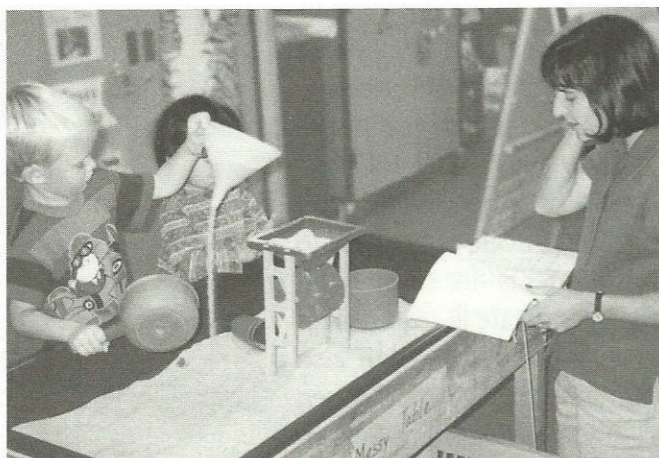
the on-campus program. Students enrolled in the distance education program are usually paraeducators or teachers in the field who do not have the early childhood special education certificate. They typically enroll in one or two courses per semester; thus, they do not complete the certificate in three semesters as do those in the on-campus program due to course load. Twenty-two students in this program were certified between 1997 and 2000.

The Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation has seven doctoral tenure track faculty and two clinical instructors with primary responsibilities in special education. Six faculty and staff members of the Utah State University's Center for Excellence in

Developmental Disabilities at the Center for Persons With Disabilities also have faculty appointments in the Department of Special Education. Two Ph.D. level and two clinical instructors are responsible for the ECSE specialization courses. In addition, a parent of children with disabilities serves as co-instructor for one course and practicum. ECSE students work primarily with the clinical instructor and parent co-instructor, as well as three to five core course instructors. The students certifying in ECSE enroll in core courses in the department with three to five of the doctoral level special education faculty.

Program Philosophy

Early childhood special educators are generally among the first nonmedical service personnel with whom young children with disabilities and their families interact. The skill of the interventionist in communicating with the family and providing appropriate services not only impacts the child's development but also the future skills of the family in interacting with other service agencies. Early childhood special educators must, therefore, be prepared to render a variety of services. They



help the family adjust to the implications of the child's disability for the child's and the family members' futures. Early childhood special educators must concentrate on skill development that prepares the child to learn and to function in the least restrictive environment possible, both as a toddler and when the child reaches school age. Therefore, early childhood special educators should be prepared not only to work with children and families but also to locate and to collaborate with other service agency personnel to ensure that the needs of the family and child for education, care, and interpersonal support are met. If the special educator cannot also be teacher, social worker, psychologist, or home health worker, he or she must be prepared to help the family find such services in the community. (Rule, 1986).

To fulfill these professional requirements, early childhood special educators must have a firm grounding in typical and atypical child development; assessment and skill evaluation; and intervention for young children based on typically occurring routines and activities, parents as program developers, and collaboration with parents and other disciplines. This summarizes the guiding principle that dictates the experiences students encounter in their coursework in the ECSE undergraduate certification program.

Program Model

The program includes coursework in several departments and colleges of the university. Students are required to take 14 credits (or four courses) in the Family and Human Development department, 6 credits (or one course) in the Elementary Education department, 2–5 credits (or two courses) in the Communicative Disorders department, 2 credits (or one course) in the Psychology department, 17 credits (or six core courses for all majors) in Special Education, and 17 credits (or 6 courses) in the early childhood special education specialization. Students apply to the special education certification program in the fall of their sophomore year. If admitted, they enroll in a block of 18 credits of teacher education courses (see below for course titles) for the spring semester of the sophomore year. Students begin the special education coursework in the fall of their junior year and proceed as a cohort through both semesters of junior year. The senior year includes a semester of student teaching and often a semester of coursework in a second area of special education, for those students desiring a dual major to earn a kindergarten to twelfth grade certificate in mild/moderate or severe. Successful completion of the special education program leads to the bachelor of science or bachelor of arts degree in Special Education. The degree requires a minimum of 120 semester credit hours, with 55 credit hours required for the early childhood certification.

Program Implementation and Recommended Practices

The personnel preparation recommended practices for activities in interdisciplinary and interagency are (1) community agency and school personnel are involved in the development of the program (PP3); (2) preparation includes skill development in interagency collaboration (PP4); (3) faculty and other personnel trainers within and across

disciplines plan and teach together regularly (PP5); (4) students/staff participate in sequenced learning activities and field experiences with students and professionals from other disciplines to learn about their own and other discipline roles and to learn about teaming practices (PP6); (5) content is integrated in unified learning experiences across related disciplines (PP23); and (6) students/staff acquire the knowledge and skills to effectively consult with other professionals (PP27). In the Utah State program, each component is woven into the course requirements of different courses as the students progress through the program. These will be explained in the chronological order the students encounter the ECSE courses.

- **PP5.** Faculty and other personnel trainers within and across disciplines plan and teach together.
- **PP6.** Students/staff participate in sequenced learning activities and field experiences with students and professionals from other disciplines to learn about their own and other discipline roles and to learn about teaming practices.

The spring semester block of five courses in teacher education include: "Foundation Studies and Practicum in Teaching and Classroom Management," "Principles and Practices of Technology for Elementary Teachers," "Educational Psychology for Teachers," "Seminar and Practicum in Early Childhood Education," and "Seminar Working with Peers on Multidisciplinary Teams." "Seminar Working with Peers" incorporates the recommended practices PP5 and PP6. This course is jointly taught by an instructor from the Family and Human Development Department who teaches the preschool practicum and seminar class and the instructor from the special education department who teaches early childhood special education specialization courses. Each student is placed in a preschool setting on the university campus four half-days a week for seven weeks and then in an elementary classroom for another seven weeks to complete the requirements for the elementary classroom experience course. The instructors organize the students into teams according to their practicum classroom settings. Each team includes students from early childhood elementary education, special education, and communicative disorders, as per enrollment in the class. The first three weeks are spent discussing teaming in general, roles and resources of team members, and the processes teams use to complete assignments. After the first three weeks of instruction, the students spend the hour of class time in their team meetings, working together to complete three assignments from the "Family and Human Development" preschool seminar class. These assignments focus on specific children the team has selected. The three assignments (classroom observation, home observation and interview, and a child case study) are divided so that each team member is responsible for completing one set of information (classroom, home, case information) for each child selected by the team. Since each member has different information, the students spend time during team meetings sharing the information to develop a quality case study. Each team's meetings are videotaped twice during the semester, and an instructor critiques the teaming process and communication.

Since students enroll in this course as they begin work in their major fields of study, the instructors wondered if they would bring varied perspectives to the experience. In the final team summary, students have affirmed that they do, reporting that they regard each member's interest or experiences in the major field as team resources. The instructors decided to include viewing and discussing the videotapes of several team meetings to illustrate specific team processes and to provide more initial guidance for the team activities early in the semester as students start their preschool experiences. Subsequently, students appear to improve in their ability to share information and to listen and encourage others to share. Students continue to practice these critical teaming skills as they complete assignments in subsequent certification coursework.

- **PP3.** Community agency and school personnel are involved in the preparation program.
- **PP6.** Students/staff participate in sequenced learning activities and field experiences with students and professionals from other disciplines to learn about their own and other discipline roles and to learn about teaming practices.
- **PP27.** Students/staff acquire knowledge and skills needed to effectively consult with other professionals.

Students complete two additional practica as part of their specialization coursework. One is in a classroom or early intervention setting with children with disabilities, and one is in a family's home. In the "Preschool Practicum with Young Children with Disabilities in Community Environments," family members are involved in these practices as students interact with written reports and in meetings centering on the child's progress. In their preschool placement, the students are required to assess a young child with a standardized and a curriculum-based test, implement instruction throughout the semester in an intensive format and in a naturalistic format, teach another adult in the classroom to implement one of the instructional formats, attend an IEP meeting, deliver a 15-minute presentation about inclusion, and teach in the large group time. This practicum is accompanied by a seminar in which students present data to their peers and discuss changes needed in intervention content or method. Each student presents programmatic data on several occasions, during which peers query with concerns and suggest additional strategies. Students are prompted, if necessary, to consult with their peers, cooperating teachers, and families to practice those skills they will need in the future to effectively consult with other professionals and family members.

During the practicum experience, each college student teaches a staff member in the preschool classroom to implement one of the instructional formats he or she has employed. The student must develop systematic steps to coach another adult providing performance feedback. Cooperating teachers evaluate each student twice a semester, and these evaluations constitute part of the practicum grade. Over the years, practicum assignments have been revised based on feedback from the cooperating teachers.

- **PP3.** Community agency and school personnel are involved in the preparation program.
- **PP5.** Faculty and other personnel within and across disciplines plan and teach together regularly.
- **PP6.** Students/staff participate in sequenced learning activities and field experiences with students and professionals from other disciplines to learn about their own roles and those of other disciplines and to learn about teaming practices.
- **PP27.** Students/staff acquire knowledge and skills needed to effectively consult with other professionals.

In the second practicum, “Seminar and Field Experiences with Young Children and Families,” students are placed in the home of a family with a young child with a disability. These families are recruited from the local birth-to-three early intervention program, based at Utah State University. Seminar assignments include initial family information gathering, observing family routines, developing and evaluating several early intervention activities with the family, and observing the early intervention program staff and a play group or classroom for toddlers. A parent of a child with a disability has been a coinstructor for this class since its inception ten years ago. The parent is the sole contact with the placement families, calling each one three times a semester for feedback about the college student. The parent also presents content, grades student assignments, arranges for parent panels on specific course topics, and, with the university instructor, modifies the course in response to student and family feedback. During panel presentation, usually three per semester, parents share their views about early intervention. Students also visit a local intensive care nursery, where a nurse discusses early development and families from the perspective of the medical profession. Students also meet with the service coordinator and other early intervention staff during a team meeting to discuss information about the family’s program as well as to brainstorm strategies for the activities the student will implement around the child’s IFSP objectives. The local birth-to-three program provides input to the instructors concerning the value of the assignments in the day to day life of an early interventionist.

Program Evaluation

Each course in the certification program includes mechanisms for student feedback. In addition to the required University evaluation form, students complete an evaluation specific to the course content and assignments. Students rate the value and helpfulness of each assignment and the amount of emphasis given to each course objective. Instructors review student input and adjust instruction accordingly. At the completion of the program, students complete a survey addressing each required certification course (both within and outside the department). They also participate in a focus group to discuss any other information they wish to share. Students are encouraged to share both positive and negative experiences. Changes are made annually in course content or format, based upon students’ report of their experience.

USU faculty have increasingly emphasized interdisciplinary activities in the program over the years as new policies are developed and new practices are encouraged and promoted by DEC. For example, the early childhood special education faculty added "Seminar Working with Peers on Multidisciplinary Teams" four years ago to address issues of collaborating with other disciplines as well as family members. In the pre-school courses, activities were added to increase the emphasis on infants and to include teaming across agencies and systems. Based upon student and agency feedback, the coinstructors of the home-based practicum added the team meeting requirement.

Implementation Challenges

To maintain the interdisciplinary activities, several key positions need to be institutionalized. The parent/coinstructor is currently paid from a personnel preparation grant. There has been discussion with the local University Center to maintain the parent position to interface with departments on campus about disability issues as well as to coteach the early childhood course.

School and agency personnel who collaborate in practicum placements are informally integrated in the training program. Cooperating teachers are not paid for accepting a practicum student; though they receive a small honorarium for supervision of student teachers, derived from student teaching fees. If a teacher agrees to supervise practicum students, a student teacher is placed in their classroom the next semester. The local

Students rate the value and helpfulness of each assignment and the amount of emphasis given to each course objective.

birth-to-three early intervention program cooperates in recruiting families for the students' home placements and supports the assignments they are required to complete. Over time, with the support of the program coordinator, it is thought that the teaming activity will be institutionalized with the other requirements. Tangible support for the early intervention staff for the additional time spent in the team meetings is still an issue that the coteachers are addressing.

The coinstructor for the "Seminar and Practicum in Early Childhood Education" from the Family and Human Development Department has taught this course as overload with support from external sources. As this support ends, there is discussion about incorporating this course as part of her departmental faculty load. The instructors have designed the experience to require minimal preparation and grading time, since the assignments are integrated into those required for another course in the block. The primary additional demand is the time required to observe student teams during the one-hour class and to provide feedback on the interactions observed. Both current instructors feel the experience is valuable for the students and, because of the minimal additional preparation time, would voluntarily continue the course without external support.

Institutional/Administrative Support

The Special Education Department has been highly supportive of including recommended practices in the early childhood special education certification program. The undergraduate secretary assists in collating the evaluation data as well as in contacting agency personnel for information. The early intervention program at the Center for Persons with Disabilities (University Center for Excellence) has supported the program by contacting families to host placements for the special education students. The collaboration between the Center and Department has been instrumental in obtaining external funding for program development. The Family and Human Development Department supported offering the "Seminar Working with Peers" in order to provide their students with interdisciplinary experiences. They have also been cooperative in admitting special education students into the required early childhood courses in their department, even to the extent of reserving slots in those courses that fill quickly. To reciprocate, the early childhood special education faculty developed a recognized university minor in Special Education for students in the Family and Human Development department. Cross-departmental collaboration is facilitated by an early childhood committee comprised of representatives from Elementary Education, Special Education, Family and Human Development, and the Center for Excellence.

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University of Northern Iowa's Implementation of DEC Recommended Practices in the Interdisciplinary and Interagency Areas

Program Context and Demographics

The State Perspective

Iowa, like many other states, has worked diligently to respond to the developing and expanding needs of teachers in early childhood programs. In May, 1995, after substantial research, a diverse group of education stakeholders, the Early Childhood/Early Childhood Special Education (EC/ECSE) Exploration and Recommendation Team, formed to guide the planning and structure of a systems change process for the justification of the new early childhood endorsement. Subsequently, a new Unified Early Childhood Endorsement for teachers of all children from birth through third grade was designed and submitted for approval to the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners. (See Chapter 2 for additional discussion of the development of Iowa's unified license.) The University of Northern Iowa (UNI) responded to this challenge and submitted the required comprehensive portfolio for an undergraduate unified program. UNI was granted program approval with program initiation in 1997.

The UNI Perspective

Faculty at UNI involved in moving to a unified program articulated a need and interest to visit some exemplary, ongoing, inclusive programs across the state, share observations and information acquired from the visitations, and discuss and identify the basic skills and competencies graduating educators would need to implement inclusive programs in their classrooms. To afford this opportunity, key faculty from each of the five departments wrote and submitted a grant proposal to the Iowa Department of Education (IDE) requesting funding to facilitate this transformation. Funding was provided that allowed faculty the opportunity to engage in a vast array of inservice activities. In an effort to keep the UNI key decision makers abreast of the transformation process, department heads, program directors, and deans were taken on a few site visits across the state to observe ongoing, exemplary, inclusive programs first-hand. This helped all those involved to obtain a cohesive vision of the types of programs in which UNI graduating students would be employed. Because Iowa has only three state supported universities, emphasis areas to be addressed at each university had been mandated by the Board of Regents. Thus, as part of the funding contingency from the IDE, UNI was expected to provide guidance and leadership to other Iowa IHEs regarding the transformation process. Information regarding the state transformation, activities, and events conducted to support the change was published in a recent article in *Teacher Education and Special Education* (Raschke, Maude, Brotherson, & Milbourn, 2001).

Program Competencies and Philosophy

For faculty at UNI, transformation to the unified endorsement consisted of a two-year process. Eight key target faculty members from five different departments met weekly and immediately recognized that information was needed to determine what specific content was currently being addressed in each course, as well as the depth and breadth of that coverage. To generate needed information, the committee designed a survey targeting 131 essential competencies across the five major topical areas delineated by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners. The results from this survey provided clear information to faculty about important competency areas that were not being addressed well and competency areas that were being redundantly addressed across courses. Once the information obtained was reviewed and discussed, many faculty members chose to substantially revise the content of courses they regularly taught in an effort to infuse essential information that was not being addressed and delete information that was receiving redundant coverage.

After analyzing and discussing results of the survey, another outcome evolved. Numerous faculty expressed an interest in acquiring additional information in several areas addressed on the survey. Based on this feedback, a variety of learning opportunities were implemented and made available to interested faculty. These included visits from nationally known inclusion professionals, directed discussions about family-centered practices, discussions addressing the range of services available in the state for children and their families, and opportunities to preview videotapes depicting interdisciplinary team services provided by an array of support professionals. As a result of the activities, discussions, and dialogues conducted across the two year time frame, a relatively stable and coherent philosophy evolved among the early childhood faculty.

It was agreed that the unified early childhood personnel preparation program at UNI would espouse a program philosophy that emphasized the importance of embracing, supporting, and accommodating all children with a vast array of individual differences and their families. Information regarding programs and services available to support families would be provided in the program and ways to promote interagency collaboration addressed. To do this, the preservice program would provide trainees with information and activities to develop the competencies and skills needed to communicate, work, and collaborate with professionals from differing disciplines. As such, skills necessary for building interpersonal relationships, for effectively communicating with professionals across disciplines in schools and agencies, and for working as an interdisciplinary team member became an integral part of the preparation program.

UNI Description

At UNI, a 650-member faculty provides programs to a total enrollment of about 13,500 students. UNI is a member of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), and the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States. The University is accredited through the master's degrees, the specialist's degrees, and the doctorate

(Doctor of Education and Doctor of Industrial Technology) by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (NCA). The University is composed of five Colleges, including Business Administration, Education, Humanities and Fine Arts, Natural Sciences, and Social and Behavior Sciences.

The College of Education (COE) is composed of six instructional units: Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Leadership-Counseling and Postsecondary Education, Educational Psychology and Foundations, School of Health, Physical Education, and Leisure Services, Special Education, and Teaching. Approximately 265 faculty are employed in the COE, offering undergraduate and graduate programs in early childhood education, elementary education, middle school education, special education, physical education, and health education. Each year, approximately 3,000 students participate in the teacher education program, with about 70 percent of these students having teaching majors within the COE and the remaining students having content area majors (mathematics, English, social studies, art, etc.) housed in other colleges.

Approximately 250 to 300 students are in the unified program. Over half of the students select double majors coupling the elementary major with the unified birth to third grade major. Because of additional coursework, an extra year of schooling is required for those students. In contrast to the double major, many students with the unified major take the coursework to obtain a minor in early childhood special education (13 additional hours of coursework), where recommended practices for working with young children with moderate and low incidence disabilities and their families are emphasized. Other minor options to couple with the unified major include remedial reading, technology, K-6 behavior disorders, K-6 moderate/severe mental disabilities, and K-6 learning disabilities. Faculty involved in providing coursework for the unified endorsement reside in five departments within the COE: Curriculum and Instruction (provides majority of coursework), Educational Psychology and Foundations, Teaching, Special Education, and the School of Health, Physical Education, and Leisure Services. The vast majority of faculty involved in course delivery in the unified endorsement are housed in the Schindler Education Center.

Program Model

All students preparing to become teachers must take 32–33 hours of professional education requirements, including twelve hours, one full semester, of student teaching in addition to 47 hours of liberal arts coursework. The remaining 50–51 hours of the 130 hours required for the Bachelor of Arts Teaching Program degree consists of coursework in the major and minor areas.

Approximately 250 to 300 students qualify for the unified endorsement degree each year. Application for admission to the Teacher Education Program requires the student to declare a teaching major and to have earned at least 24 semester hours of credit with at least a 2.50 grade index. Students must successfully complete speech and hearing evaluations, as well as pass the required basic skills test. In addition to student teaching (twelve hours) and the human relations course (three hours),

which are taken concurrently during the last semester of the program, courses in the professional education sequence are provided in three tiers and must be taken sequentially across a minimum of three semesters. The coursework required for all students seeking teaching endorsements provides the foundation information addressing educational practices.

Unique to UNI is a Four Year Graduation Pact that, in essence, assists students in completing the undergraduate degree within four calendar years of their initial freshman enrollment. While there are a variety of general conditions that govern this pact, (e.g., students must enter UNI as freshmen with appropriate high school preparation to begin a four-year graduation plan), it is the goal of the program to ensure coursework availability affording students a four-year graduation time frame.

Program Implementation and Recommended Practices

The six DEC personnel preparation recommended practices related to “learning activities are interdisciplinary and interagency” are integrated throughout UNI’s unified program. The following narrative discusses and provides specific examples of how these practices are included in UNI’s preservice program.

- **PP6.** Students/staff participate in sequenced learning activities and field experiences with students and professionals from other disciplines to learn about their own and other discipline roles and to learn about teaming practices.
- **PP23.** Content is integrated in unified learning experiences across related disciplines.

The professional education foundation sequence required for all future educators at UNI provides the philosophical underpinnings for the pedagogical practices addressed in the methods coursework. Four foundation courses, “Dynamics of Human Development,” “Nature and Conditions of Learning,” “Schools and American Society,” and “Educating Diverse Learners,” are interwoven with two field experiences so that all teacher education students acquire theoretical information regarding educational practices, enabling them to utilize the foundation information as a basis for interpreting and analyzing the pedagogical interactions they observe during the two initial field experiences. Throughout the professional foundation coursework, the importance of collaborating with professionals from other disciplines to provide comprehensive programs and services to children and their families is addressed (Winton, McCollum, & Catlett, 1997).

In the two field experiences, students observe and work with children, with and without disabilities, who represent diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds in a range of service delivery options, from programs in self-contained schools to programs in fully inclusive schools. Early childhood education majors also learn about the role of home interventionists in providing services to maximize growth, development, and learning for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in the home setting. Within this context, students observe professionals from diverse disciplines (e.g., occupational

therapists, physical therapists, speech pathologists) collectively working together to design comprehensive programs to best meet the needs of a child in the context of his or her family. Students observe play-based assessments conducted by professionals from different disciplines and see how information is compiled regarding the child's and family's progress on targeted short term goals and long term objectives. Opportunities to observe families involved with team members in the goal setting process on individualized education plans (IEPs) and individualized family service plans (IFSPs) are also provided in the initial field experiences.

The following display depicts some of the typical activities incorporated into the foundation courses of the professional sequence to help students recognize the various disciplines involved in the delivery of comprehensive services to children.

Abbreviated Menu of Interdisciplinary and Interagency Activities Infused into Professional Coursework

- Compare and evaluate different service provider roles. Based on your observations, describe how these differing professionals communicate with each other regarding the children and families they are serving.
- Observe an interdisciplinary team meeting. Take copious notes covering the information addressed during the meeting. Identify the diverse roles of the differing team members.
- As a future education professional, identify which disciplines you feel most comfortable working with at this time. Speculate why you think this is the case.
- Develop an illustrative portrayal of a child with special needs, identifying the child's individual characteristics, capabilities, and limitations. Address the differing service providers who would comprise an interdisciplinary team to target this child's needs.
- Speculate as to the challenges that might be encountered by an interdisciplinary team of culturally diverse individuals.
- With your classmates, set up a mock interdisciplinary team where each member describes their role in providing services to a child with a disability and his/her family to other team members.

● **PP4.** Preparation includes skill development in interagency collaboration.

● **PP27.** Students/staff acquire knowledge and skills needed to effectively consult with other professionals.

After successful completion of the professional foundation sequence, students begin taking coursework in their major and minor areas. Six courses in the early childhood major and one corresponding practicum have been designed to provide essential learning opportunities and experiences. These courses include: (1) "Nutrition for Early Childhood Education," (2) "Infant and Toddler Care," (3) "Early Childhood

Curriculum Development and Organization," (4) "Community Relationships," (5) "Guidance and Instruction in Early Childhood," and (6) "Child, Family, School." The practicum is taken concurrently with the "Guidance and Instruction" course. In addition to developing skills to work directly with children with and without disabilities, emphasis is placed on the importance and value of developing collaborative skills to work with other professionals in the schools, as well as developing skills needed to effectively communicate and work with professionals from differing agencies in the community. The mission, in addition to providing effective instructional programs for children, is to develop the skills in trainees to empower families, which in turn benefits the well being and development of the child (McCollum & Stayton, 1996). After an initial course in the major, it is intended that students will begin to see their role as a member of a team who works with children and families to address their needs and provide the supports necessary for constructive healthy relationships to evolve.

The conceptualization of a continuum of learning supports is essential if students are to design instructional programs to enable all children to learn and play together (Raschke et al., 1996). The UNI program stresses that educators may lack information about a specific skill area and must learn to consult with other professionals to help them generate and incorporate appropriate learning supports that enable children to participate. Four models of educational collaboration are addressed in the program: consultation, coaching, networking, and cooperative teaching (Elliot & McKenny, 1998; Lieberman, 1996; Vail, Tschantz, & Bevil, 1997; Walther, Christine, Bryant, & Land, 1996). The value of collaboration is repeatedly emphasized, both for a seeker and a provider of information. (Fishbaugh, 1997). It is from this context that the importance of learning how to communicate with and effectively work with other professionals, both within the context of the school and the community, is addressed.

A vast array of instructional activities are infused into courses in the major, including role-playing activities, panel discussions, and case method of instruction scenarios to help students develop the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to effectively work with professionals from diverse disciplines and to collaboratively design and implement programs that provide comprehensive services to children and their families (Winton et al., 1997). Specific skills that are addressed include:

- Incorporating and demonstrating active/reflective listening skills with other professionals
- Consistently valuing and maintaining confidences
- Respectfully sharing complete, unbiased information with other professionals
- Demonstrating the use of communication skills of dialogue and discussion
- Respecting differing cultures, beliefs, and attitudes of team members and professionals in differing agencies as issues and concerns are discussed, and treating all team members as responsible, trustworthy people.

Content such as team-based decision making, adult learning principles, and conflict resolution strategies is essential to prepare students to applying interdisciplinary and family-centered principles. In addition, developing the skills to collaborate and make

decisions with other professionals within and outside the educational arena to support children's development, learning, and well being is critical. These skills are addressed extensively in the "Child, Family, School" and "Community Relationships" courses. Content addressing the myriad of services, resources, and supports available in the community, and at the state and federal level, goes well beyond knowledge encompassing the fourteen required early intervention services. Information regarding funding sources that support special needs, medical assistance programs that can help families, and advocacy services available to families is covered. Opportunities to practice using the Internet to obtain information about support services and supportive agencies/organizations are provided, as well as chances for students to discuss the challenges they encounter in their hours of required service. In the "Community Relationships" class, students work together each semester to update and compile information regarding resources in each Iowa county that are available to assist families who have children with special needs. Students are required to visit ten differing services and/or agencies and share information obtained with classmates.

Service coordination is also addressed in the "Community Relationships" course. Four phases of activities involved in service coordination—getting started, follow along, unexpected/immediate need/crisis, and transitions—are thoroughly addressed (Rosin, Green, Hecht, Tuchman, & Robbins, 1996). Differing models of service coordination and the strengths and limitations of each are discussed (Whitehead, 1996). Using case method of instruction, students are challenged to identify service coordination issues, identify positive aspects of the situation, discuss factors contributing to the issue, identify available options, and choose a plan of action (McWilliam & Bailey, 1993). This process requires students to use collaborative interpersonal skills to utilize and integrate information they have acquired about resources, agencies, and support systems to problem solve and delineate a plan of action. It also provides a valuable medium, requiring students to ground theoretical learning in practice as they collectively engage in problem solving and decision making. The outcome is that students become knowledgeable about various resources and supports available to families and are cognizant of strategies and procedures to ensure that provided services are coordinated, comprehensive, interagency, and interdisciplinary in nature (Hansen & Lovett, 1992).

Abbreviated Menu of Interdisciplinary and Interagency Activities Infused into Major Coursework

- With five other students, role play a mock panel of community agency employees and school personnel attempting to work with a child with a disability and his family.
- Identify three strategies and give examples of ways the strategies could facilitate communication across professionals in school and community agencies.
- Role play how to resolve a conflict among professionals from different agencies regarding how to best address a family crisis situation.
- Demonstrate body language that indicates active listening postures when working with diverse professionals.
- Identify three topical areas that could be viewed very differently from three distinct disciplines.
- Identify 10 killer phrases that, when used by an educational professional, thwart the development of a cohesive team.
- List 10 practices that diverse professionals on a team can systematically incorporate to empower families to work with a son or daughter with a disability.
- Develop a resource file identifying agencies and resources that can provide services or help families of children with disabilities.
- Do a self-analysis of your intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, delineating two areas that you would like to target for improvement.

● **PP3.** Community agency and school personnel are involved in the preparation program.

● **PP5.** Faculty and other personnel trainers within and across disciplines plan and teach together regularly.

Faculty from differing disciplines in the program frequently coteach together to model and demonstrate the importance and value of a collaborative interdisciplinary orientation. This has been accomplished creatively by scheduling two related courses that target differing populations, e.g., methods for EC and methods for ECSE, at the same time weekly in classrooms in the same building and in close proximity. Providing a collaborative coteaching model is essential if students are expected to feel comfortable coteaching or working across disciplines when they enter the profession. While this model requires additional planning time, it has been the experience of the faculty that the gains clearly outweigh the losses. Additionally, panel presentations composed of professionals from community agencies that are provided in several courses enable students to become more familiar with the interdisciplinary nature of early childhood services. For example, a panel of home interventionists speaks each semester and emphasizes the value and importance of interagency collaboration.

Providing students with information from individuals such as the parents of children with disabilities or teachers who themselves are disabled provides a “slice of reality” to the program. Names of parents, siblings, or relatives of young children with disabilities who are comfortable sharing their stories have been compiled by the Iowa Department of Education (IDE). Inservice training opportunities are available for those individuals interested in how to best share their stories with future EC/ECSE professionals. Additionally, the IDE allocates resources to compensate these individuals for their participation in university programs. Coteaching of the “Child, Family, School” course by a parent of a child with a disability is a high priority because of the integrity and validation that it brings to the program (Whitehead & Sontag, 1993). Further, incorporating panel or discussion groups with fathers, siblings, or relatives of a child with a disability also occurs frequently.

Engaging in coteaching activities with family members with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds is a highly prioritized activity throughout courses in the major. These activities clearly help faculty in their own professional development and infuse into coursework knowledge about unique family characteristics, including differing beliefs about a disability, child-rearing practices, and verbal and nonverbal communication styles. This content helps students take into account cultural and ethnic influences as they learn to look at each family individually.

Student teaching consists of two experiences, each lasting eight weeks across one semester. One eight-week experience must be in a program providing services to infants and toddlers through age five and their families (at least one child must have an IFSP or an IEP), while the other eight-week experience is required to be in a program with children in an inclusive classroom, kindergarten through third grade. Opportunities for students to participate in the development of an IFSP or an IEP incorporating both child and family outcomes and in partnership with family members and other services providers are provided.

Additionally, student teachers are required to participate in inservice and professional development activities in the district where they are student teaching. This frequently includes activities in which health service providers, speech and language pathologists, social work professionals, etc., address information about resources and services in the community.

An advisory board has been formed to provide input to faculty regarding the ongoing unified program. This committee is composed of twelve members, with three of the members representing different agencies in Iowa that provide support services to young children with disabilities and their families. Ways for students to participate in differing activities of support service agencies are identified and ways of improving the quality of the participations are addressed.

Program Evaluation

Important to program maintenance, modification, or termination is the feedback received from its students and the professional workforce. They are asked to identify and

delineate training program strengths and weaknesses. In addition to traditional course evaluations throughout the program, students are randomly selected for discussion groups and interviews regarding the quality of the program of which they were a part. All students who have successfully matriculated through the program complete an exit interview and written evaluation. Graduates are encouraged to identify those courses that were most and least valuable and those faculty who were most and least instrumental in affecting their performance in their educational programs. The results of feedback from the 600–700 graduating teachers is compiled, tabulated, and sent to all faculty members involved in their program, including general education, professional education, and major/minor professors. Focus groups of faculty gather and use student feedback to modify and tailor existing coursework.

A few program modifications have been made based on feedback from students, as well as from cooperating teachers and home interventionists. Requiring students to become more versed in how to identify resources available in specific educational agency areas was recommended, because resource availability varies considerably across districts. Consequently, lists of resources in each of the fifteen area education agencies have been compiled by students. Each semester, teams of students are required to update the information while, at the same time, becoming acquainted with the array of resources available. Students also receive information about the vast array of agencies that serve as funding resources for innovative projects. Acquainting students with basic grant writing formats and sharing grant proposals that have been funded helps them to see this option as a viable source for project funding.

Implementation Challenges

Faculty attempting to work collaboratively across two colleges and five departments to deliver the unified program have encountered a variety of challenges and obstacles. Because of the large number of students matriculating through the unified program, it is difficult to track changes in the differing instructional units, and there are instances where, clearly, the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. Initial effort in the development of the unified program by the faculty to identify missing and overlapping content across the curricula was commendable. However, five years later, with program implementation fully underway, the need for faculty to again take a systematic approach to identify and delineate the outcomes being addressed within each course, as well as information regarding depth, breadth, and extent of coverage being provided, is pressing.

The other major area of concern articulated by faculty concerns the need to incorporate more information into coursework that addresses recommended practices for providing services to infants, toddlers, and young school-age children with low incidence disabilities. A review of the literature has been conducted to help compile information regarding the essential content that must be infused into existing coursework. Agreement as to which information might be best addressed in which course has yet to be determined. The class activities, visitations, panels, etc., that need to be incorporated into courses to best address content in this area must also be delineated.

Institutional/Administrative Support

The university system affords many avenues for acquiring information regarding program effectiveness. Faculty are encouraged by the Dean of the COE and its department heads to initiate evaluative measures regarding program effectiveness and to share information across departments to help identify program strengths and limitations. Administratively, faculty are provided merit pay incentives for engaging in collaborative ventures, such as coteaching or grant writing, especially when it involves colleagues outside one's department and/or college or at another university/college. An Advising Center located in the COE does all the advising of EC/ECSE and elementary education majors. Orientations regarding program options are provided by the Advising Center throughout the year. However, keeping the Advising Center abreast of any programmatic changes, regardless of how insignificant they might seem, can be a challenge.

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