Spring 2011

Evaluation of a Merged Secondary and Special Education Program

Ann Fullerton Dr.
Portland State University, fullertona@pdx.edu

Barbara Ruben
Portland State University, rubenb@pdx.edu

Stephanie McBride
Portland State University, mcbrides@pdx.edu

Susan Bert
Portland State University, berts@pdx.edu

Citation Details

Fullerton, A., Ruben, B. J., McBride, S., & Bert, S. (2011). Evaluation of a Merged Secondary and Special Education Program. Teacher Education Quarterly, 38(2), 45-60.

Evaluation of a Merged Secondary and Special Education Program

By Ann Fullerton, Barbara J. Ruben, Stephanie McBride, & Susan Bert

Ann Fullerton is a professor in the Department of Special Education, Barbara J. Ruben is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Stephanie McBride is a senior instructor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and Susan Bert is a senior instructor in the Department of Special Education, all in the Graduate School of Education at Portland State University, Portland, Oregon.

Many have expressed concerns that both content area and secondary special education secondary teachers are not adequately prepared to help all adolescents learn academic content (Blanton & Pugagh, 2007). Some argue that secondary special educators often lack sufficient content area preparation to teach the subjects they are assigned (Brouk, 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2005) or that middle and high school teachers often lack strategies to differentiate content area instruction for students' various reading levels and learning needs (McClanahan, 2008; Ness, 2008). The passage of NCLB in 2001 and IDEIA in 2004 have brought such concerns to the forefront of educational reform, by requiring that teachers be highly qualified in the subjects they teach and that schools "make good on the expectation that all students across diversities of race, class, language, or culture, as well as disability, can succeed in school" (Blanton & Pugach, 2007).

If classroom teachers are among the greatest

determinant of student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000), then teacher preparation programs have a role to play improving educational outcomes for struggling learners. Since the initial passage of PL 94-142 in 1975 and the growth of the field of special education, the status quo in k-12 teacher education has been separate programs for general educators and special educators. But at the same time, the number of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has steadily increased (Blanton & Pugach, 2007), along with a rise in students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Thus, it is argued that today's teachers need a wider range of skills in order to teach effectively (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Both secondary teachers (McHatton & McCray, 2007) and secondary special educators (Bouck, 2005) have felt inadequately prepared by their teacher preparation programs for the responsibilities they face. Although 96% of classroom teachers teach students with disabilities, only one third had received pre-service training in collaboration, and less than half in adaptations (SpENSE, 2001). In discussing how to prepare new secondary teachers, experienced secondary teachers stress the importance of learning collaboration and inclusive practices, and feel that effective pedagogy is at least as important as content knowledge in order to reach all students successfully (Gateley, 2005). Professional organizations involved in teacher education have called for greater integration of general and special education pedagogies in teacher education programs (Blanton & Pugach, 2007).

There are currently three established teacher preparation program models: *discrete*, *integrated*, and *merged* (Blanton & Pugach, 2007). In the *discrete* model, which is the most widely implemented of the three, general and special education programs are separate. Elementary and secondary teacher candidates are provided with only one course in special education and there is minimal faculty collaboration to merge special and general education pedagogy, and assess each candidate's competency to teach students with disabilities. In the *integrated* model, separate programs are retained but faculty work together to develop some courses and/or field experiences in which special education candidates learn about the general education curriculum while general education candidates learn about inclusive education. In *merged* programs, "faculty prepare general and special educators, using a single curriculum in which courses and field experiences are designed to address the needs of all students, including those who have disabilities" (Blanton & Pugach, 2007, p.14).

Teacher licensure varies across these three models. In the discrete model, candidates seeking dual licensure in general and special education must complete one full program before beginning another. In the integrated model, general and special education program requirements are coordinated in such a way that candidates can add special education licensure more readily to their general education licensure. In the merged model, all candidates obtain both general and special education licensure.

While most integrated or merged programs are at the elementary level, there are a few examples in secondary education (as in Griffin & Pugach, 2007). Integrated

programs typically involve a single class or a set of classes with a field experience in which secondary and special education faculty co-teach either secondary candidates (Turner, 2003) or both secondary and special education candidates (Waters & Burcroff, 2007). Others have developed a series of additional coursework and field assignments for groups of secondary content area and special education candidates to take together. Dieker and Berg (2002), for example, taught special education candidates about math/science instruction and math/science teacher candidates about instructing exceptional learners and then the two groups developed units together. Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, and Rouse (2007) provided secondary and special education candidates an enhanced curriculum with field experiences in inclusive classrooms. A few merged secondary/special education programs have been briefly described (Blanton & Pugach, 2007; Griffin & Pugach, 2007).

Many questions arise regarding the capabilities that might distinguish graduates of merged programs, the program design needed to develop these capabilities, and the impact graduates could have in schools and classrooms. Perhaps graduates of merged programs working as content area teachers may engage in differentiated planning, use content enhancement, or be able to support struggling readers. Perhaps graduates of merged programs working in special education will be more effective in teaching content to students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Finally, whether working as content area teachers or special educators, graduates of merged programs may bring collaboration and co-teaching skills that help bridge more effectively special and general education.

In order to prepare secondary teachers with these or other capabilities, questions regarding program development and design arise. How can faculty identify a shared base of knowledge for all teachers that facilitates the development of a coherent curriculum (Griffin & Pugagh, 2007)? What depth of content knowledge preparation is needed (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCalium, 2005)? What is the optimal progression of coursework and field experiences that can blend general and special education pedagogy into a teacher's practice? How can field experiences be structured in such a way that candidates can understand how students are impacted by the special and general education systems?

We have yet to identify what graduates of merged programs might provide schools (Griffin & Pugach, 2007). Do graduates plan and deliver instruction differently? Do they approach collaboration differently than teachers prepared as either content area teachers or special educators? Do principals find ways to take advantage of graduates' dual-licensure in how they structure teaching assignments? And, most importantly, are graduates of merged programs effective in teaching a wide range of learners in the classroom?

In order to address these questions, research regarding the development, design and evaluation of merged programs is needed. Fullerton, Ruben, McBride, and Bert (2011) describe the development and initial implementation of the Secondary Dual Educator's Program (SDEP), a merged secondary education program. SDEP

is a full-time graduate program culminating in licensure as a secondary educator in a content area (authorization to teach mid-level and/or high school), licensure in secondary special education, and a Master in Education (M.Ed.). This article uses data from multiple stakeholders to evaluate whether SDEP candidates and graduates are meeting program goals.

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 content-specific methods for teaching the content area.

(2) Differentiate units, lessons and assessments for a diverse range of learners.

(3) Accommodate the diverse needs of 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 students with learning disabilities.

(7) Adapt unit and lesson plans for students with varying needs and diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds.

(8) Use classroom management and positive behavior support strategies.

(9) Understand assessment and instruction for students with significant disabilities.

(10) Become change agents and leaders for responsible inclusion.

Evaluation Method

The following evaluation questions were addressed through analysis of candidate performance, and information gathered from graduates, supervisors, and principals who employed graduates.

Evaluation Questions

(1) Do SDEP candidates and graduates accommodate the needs of diverse students within inclusive classrooms?

(2) Do SDEP candidates and graduates engage in differentiated planning, assessment, and instruction for a diverse range of learners?

(3) Do SDEP candidates and graduates initiate collaborative planning, assessment and problem solving with students, teachers, educational assistants, and parents?

Participants

Candidates and Graduates. Forty-four teacher candidates—22 from the 2006-07 cohort and 22 from the 2008-09 cohort—participated in the study. Twenty-six were females and 18 were males. Graduates were licensed in the following content areas: three in math, 12 in social studies, four in health, eight in science (biology, integrated science, chemistry), nine in language arts/English, one in Spanish, one in business education, and six in art.

The follow-up portion of the evaluation was focused on the 2007 graduates. Eight were employed as full-time content area teachers (three in science, two in English, one in art, one in math, and one in health) and six as full-time learning specialists or other roles in special education. The remaining eight graduates were hired by principals who created blended assignments in which graduates worked as both content area teachers and special educators. These blended positions demonstrated the flexibility afforded principals in hiring graduates of a merged program.

Faculty. Two faculty members from curriculum and instruction and two from special education who had taught in the program and/or served a cohort leaders participated in the evaluation. The faculty had an average of 12 years of experience in teacher education and 11 years in K-12 education or related professions.

Supervisors. Seven supervisors who had supervised student teachers in both the SDEP program and in either the special education or secondary education discrete programs participated. Supervisors had 3-10 years of experience in university supervision and 10-30 years of experience in K-12 education. All had masters or doctoral degrees in education and three were former administrators.

Principals who hired graduates. Three principals (two middle school and one high school) who had hired teachers prepared in discrete programs and merged programs in the past two years participated. All had five-plus years of administrative experience and had employed an SDEP graduate for one and a half years at the time of the interview.

Evaluation Tools and Procedures

Teacher Candidate's Self-assessment of Competency (TCSC). The TCSC is a self assessment of competency in areas such as planning and instruction, adapting unit and lesson plans for students with diverse needs, and collaboration. The TCSC is an informal tool requiring additional validation and is used here to provide

descriptive information. Candidates rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1= "not there", 2= "starting to understand", 3= "competent compared to other teachers (proficient)", and 4= "More competent compared to other teachers (exemplary)." Candidates also provide written reflections regarding their learning gains and areas for continued development. The TCSC was administered to the 2006-07 cohort after student teaching, at program completion, and one year later.

Faculty Work Sample Review (FWSR). Faculty use the FWSR to examine teacher candidate work samples for evidence of appropriate and effective use of the following methods or processes: (1) provide accommodations for individual students, (2) gather information about students to inform planning and instruction, (3) develop and teach differentiated objectives, (4) design and implement formative assessment and use data to make instructional decisions, and (5) initiate collaboration with colleagues, educational assistants and others. To establish reliability in coding, two faculty each reviewed five work samples independently, compared their coding, and honed definitions and criteria until inter-rater agreement reached 90%. Eighteen content area work samples from the 2006-07 and 18 from the 2008-09 cohorts were reviewed. Candidates had completed coursework and field experiences in special education and content area instruction prior to completing the work samples.

School-wide Program Evaluation Survey (SPES). The SPES survey is administrated to all teacher candidates in the university upon program completion and one year later. Responses of the SDEP graduates to the following items were examined: "My program prepared me to promote inclusive environments" and "My program prepared me to ensure that all learners succeed." Written responses to open-ended questions were also reviewed. The SPES was administered to the 2006-07 cohort.

Interviews with Graduates (Int-G). Mid-way through their first year of teaching, five graduates of the 2006-07 cohort were asked if they used any of the concepts and skills taught in the program and if so, to provide examples.

Interviews with University Supervisors (Int-S) *and Principals who hired graduates (Int-P)*.University supervisors were interviewed regarding candidates they had supervised and principals regarding teachers they had employed. Both groups were asked if they observed any difference between teachers prepared in discrete versus merged programs in the following areas: accommodating the needs of diverse learners, differentiating unit plans, lessons, assessments for diverse learners, and collaboration. If interviewees responded "yes," they were asked for specific examples.

Results

Evaluation Question 1

Do SDEP teacher candidates and graduates accommodate the needs of individual students within inclusive classrooms?

During the first month of the program, 95% of the candidate self-reflections expressed favorable views regarding the need to provide accommodations for students in content area classrooms. One candidate wrote: " As a teacher, it is not our job just to educate the people who learn the easiest, or more in accordance with our teaching style." And another said: " If students are unable to obtain the information then your job as a teacher is pointless. I think that all of us should be thinking about supporting our students with or without disabilities."

Teacher candidate self assessment (TCSC). Over time, candidates self-ratings suggested they felt they were learning to "adapt unit and lesson plans for students with diverse needs, and for students with varying cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds." Upon completion of their first content-area student teaching and work sample, candidates rated themselves as "starting to understand" (M=2.7) and after the second student teaching and work sample as "competent compared to other teachers (proficient)" (M=3.2). Upon graduation (M=3.5) and one year later (M=3.3) they continued to rate themselves as competent (proficient) in adapting units and lessons. Although teacher candidates' self ratings have limited value for objective evaluation purposes, they do suggest that the graduates believed they were developing competency in providing accommodations.

Candidates described their growth in learning to provide individual accommodations as content area classroom teachers. One wrote: "I taught 7th grade mathematics to four inclusive classes comprised of diverse learners. I found that supports I designed for the ELL and IEP students helped all students access the material. I saw firsthand how well universal design works in a modern classroom." Another reflected on successfully providing accommodations in a science class where 15 of the 35 students had IEP or 504 plans. These students made pre-post gains that matched or exceeded the class average and she observed that students who were not identified but nevertheless struggled also benefited from the accommodations in place.

Faculty work sample review (FWSR). Faculty found evidence in candidates' work samples that they provided accommodations for students with IEPs. Candidates met with special educators to learn what accommodations were needed by students in their classes. Examples of accommodations included: providing lesson notes, books on tape, extra time on assessments, reading tests aloud, and developing alternative assignments and assessments. Evidence was also found that candidates provided accommodations for ELL students and for non-identified but struggling students when appropriate.

Interviews with supervisors (Int-S). During interviews, university supervisors gave multiple examples of how SDEP candidates provided accommodations. Several supervisors commented on the value of SDEP candidates having special education coursework and field experiences prior to the term in which they completed their content area student teaching. One supervisor noted that the program sequence "makes the candidate aware of the whole class and of the students who have learning differences at both ends of the spectrum. If you do a generic lesson plan and have to learn the accommodations later, it is less likely to happen. When accommodations occur after planning, classroom teachers might think 'It's too much work, I don't have time to make a different worksheet. If they don't get it, they don't get it.' SDEP candidates always plan with accommodations in mind."

Interviews with graduates (Int-G). In follow-up interviews, one graduate described the value of the special education preparation for her work as a middle school science teacher: "There are five to seven kids in each of my classes who have special needs that I do different accommodations for. I would be completely lost if I did not have the special education endorsement." Another middle school language arts teacher noted "SDEP taught me how to have empathy for students in my classroom who are saying 'I don't get it' and instead of just telling them to do their homework, SDEP really teaches you how to help students with disabilities."

Interviews with principals (Int-P). The three principals interviewed reported that SDEP graduates provided accommodations in their classrooms. One stated: "[the SDEP graduate] understands kids who struggle to learn in a deeper way. I noticed this right off…she can adapt her curriculum and modify for each kid." Another said: "You see the ability to read learning differences more quickly than teachers [prepared in discrete programs]. General education teachers will refer an issue with a student to a specialist and ask them to come in. [SDEP graduates] do not always need this; they can quickly make individualized instruction decisions."

When discussing how SDEP graduates provided accommodations, supervisors and principals also reported that they have more empathy and sensitivity for students with disabilities, advocate for accommodations with their colleagues, and have higher expectations for students with disabilities than most beginning secondary teachers.

Summary. Overall, evidence from several sources suggests that when working as content area teachers, SDEP graduates provided accommodations for individual students, including students with IEPs, ELL students, and other students who struggled in their classes.

Evaluation Question 2

Do SDEP candidates and graduates engage in differentiated planning, assessment, and instruction for a diverse range of learners?

Teacher candidates' self assessment (TCSC). Several candidates entered the program with goals that fit well with differentiation, for example, one wrote that she wanted "...to be a science teacher who could teach any kid that comes into my room." Upon completing their first content-area student teaching and work sample, candidates rated themselves as "starting to understand" (M=2.7) the process of "designing instruction that leads to desired learning outcomes". Upon completion of the second content-area student teaching and work sample (M= 3.2), at graduation (M=3.5) and one year after graduation (M=3.3) they rated themselves as competent (proficient) compared with other teachers in this area.

Regarding planning instruction, one candidate said: "Being in the SDEP program changed the way I looked at a classroom. When you are designing your lessons or your curriculum, you are thinking about all the students. You can see some of the student challenges as an opportunity to bring a lot of creativity and diversity to your lessons". . Another wrote: "I have learned how to use various tools to determine the abilities, interests, and habits of many students and incorporate that information into lesson plans."

Candidates learned about formative assessment, as indicated by this candidates' statement: "I was able to see the practical results of my day-to-day instruction through formative assessments, and to modify my instruction, for the whole group and for individuals to improve the outcomes." They also used a variety of instructional strategies to increase access to content and differentiate instruction, as one candidate notes: "My [social studies] unit was designed to allow students to acquire knowledge in multiple ways to assist varying learning styles. I challenged the students daily with higher thinking activities, while at the same time scaffolding tougher concepts to help each student to succeed." Another said: "I now use unit organizers, post the daily agenda, pose essential questions, and explicitly teach vocabulary. I use a variety of learning activities to reach unit/lesson objectives. Universal design and formative assessment is now the norm."

Faculty Work Sample Review (FWSR). Faculty found evidence in work samples that indicated candidates had engaged in differentiated planning and instruction. Candidates gathered information for planning through learning profiles, informal reading inventories, interest inventories, and teacher-developed assessments of background knowledge of the content and/or funds of cultural knowledge. This information was used to develop objectives, determine small groups, structure learning stations, incorporate multiple modalities into lessons, choose reading materials, and create alternative ways to complete assignments. Planning tools included: pyramid planning to develop 'all,' 'most,' 'some' objectives, differentiation of content, process, and product, and tiered lesson planning. Formative assessment methods used to gather data for instructional decisions included: exit slips, one on one checks, regular progress checks built into the unit, daily check-ins, immediate feedback, daily oral assessment to determine re-teaching decisions, in-progress grading, and

self-monitoring. Candidates used content enhancement such as unit and lesson organizers, graphic organizers for teaching content, daily agendas, and essential questions. Some fostered an inclusive learning community through peer-mentoring, heterogeneous grouping, and structured group participation. Behavior and literacy supports were also evident. Disaggregated pre-post assessments conducted by the candidates showed gains for all students (grades 7-12), ELL students, talented and gifted students, and students with disabilities (Ruben, Fullerton, & Bert, 2009).

Interviews with supervisors (Int-S). All supervisors reported that SDEP candidates engaged in differentiated planning and instruction in content area classrooms. One supervisor said: "[SDEP candidates] make a detailed survey of every student in their class. They know who they are and they start off thinking about how to reach those students." Another supervisor said: "The main thing I've noticed is that they are very sensitive to the needs of the kids. They make a special effort to check in with them every day. They are not afraid of students with differences. They are very at ease. Mentor teachers have noticed this as well."

Comparing candidates from discrete and merged programs, one supervisor and retired administrator commented: "There is a difference. We talk differentiation, but many teachers don't practice it. You really can't afford to teach to the middle. The SDEP candidates really know how to do this... [they have] a wide lens about differentiation and how they look at kids in their classroom. I wish every teacher candidate had this approach. It makes them more sensitized and they are prepared to hit the ground running when they get hired." Supervisors reported that having special education coursework and field experiences prior to student teaching in a content area classroom "really opened [candidates] eyes [to] see how they can build differentiation into lesson planning right from the start."

Supervisors also related that when SDEP candidates faced challenges they had more ideas of what to do and could select from general and special education strategies. This strengthened their classroom management. Other examples given included: meeting with the student, providing oral pre-test rather than written, task analysis, the popcorn reading technique, a toolbox of behavior supports, strategies to help students with ADHD complete work, and providing students with learning disabilities multiple pathways in multiple modalities to content information. One supervisor described how a SDEP candidate: "puts in pieces that help special education kids; like using the game show technique: 'Ask a friend' where kids can ask another student for more information." Another supervisor reported that a candidate's mentor teacher said: "she knows what to do when discipline issues arise, and deals with the student directly, on the spot, rather than sending him/her to the office." And another supervisor recounted a situation faced by a SDEP candidate in which advanced students were putting down the other students in the class. He "had the advanced students be the teachers, and [guided them] to think about how to help other kids be successful."

School-wide program evaluation survey (SPES). After teaching for a year, graduates were asked what part of the program most contributed to their professional development. Of the 13 open-ended comments obtained from SDEP graduates, four discussed learning how to differentiate without losing content levels needed by different students in the classroom. Seventy-one percent of graduates "strongly agreed" that the program "prepared me to promote inclusive environments" and 59% "strongly agreed" that "my program prepared me to ensure all learners succeed."

Interviews with graduates (Int-G). In follow-up interviews, graduates continued to discuss their use of differentiated planning. One graduate described that in a classroom of 24 students, "I've got three [students] who need really advanced material and four who I need to modify a lot for and everything in-between. But I am comfortable with it, which I probably would not have been if I had not been in this program." Another graduate said that in order to plan "you think about where everybody's at and come up with an objective and think about how to get all the kids there." And another said "I have learned how to teach [students with disabilities] without taking content away."

Interviews with principals (Int-P). Principals reported that teachers prepared in a merged secondary program were more ready and able to differentiate instruction than teachers prepared in a discrete secondary program. One noted, "I see a lot more scaffolding to support learning" and another said that "basically [the SDEP graduate] can break down the content for any kid who is struggling to learn." Another said: "[the teacher from the merged program] is looking at the student more creatively. She has the tools to differentiate curriculum. In the classroom you see differentiation happening faster than with [teachers from discrete programs]."

One principal had assigned a SDEP graduate to teach both a structured reading program to a class of struggling readers and Advanced Placement English, and found her to be effective with both groups:

> She is going into classes that are at the extremes. She can keep them engaged and on task to get ready for the AP exam. She finds the connection for kids and helps them. She focuses on finding out who the kids are and connecting them with the curriculum. A lot of that comes out of the special education piece. She helps kids to find meaning in a different way and connect their learning to real life.

Summary: Evidence from multiple sources indicated when working as content area teachers SDEP candidates and graduates gathered and used information about their students to develop differentiated objectives and instruction, and used formative assessment to monitor student learning and make instructional decisions. They also implemented a variety of instructional strategies to support diverse learning needs and foster an inclusive classroom community.

Evaluation Question 3:

How do SDEP teacher candidates and graduates view collaboration and engage in collaboration?

Teacher candidates' self assessment (TCSC). After coursework and field assignments in collaboration, as well as student teaching in special and general education, candidates reflected on the value of collaboration: "I enjoy team work and believe it is incredibly important when working with youth. I work on making sure I communicate what I am doing, have done or am thinking of planning with my colleagues as appropriate. Communication is very important. I am now starting to see how parents and the community can become a part of the team, which I had not thought about before." Another described her willingness to call on her special education colleagues: "I feel comfortable accommodating for most students and when I am out of ideas I have no problem asking for help and utilizing other resources. I find asking for help a really good skill to have, it allows me to help a more diverse range of student needs" (08-09 cohort).

Candidates rated themselves as proficient at the end of the program (3.5) as well as one year later (3.2) in collaborating with colleagues, parents, and members of the community to promote student learning. They also viewed themselves as proficient in coordinating the use of educational assistants and others in their classroom at the end of the program (3.3) and one year later (3.3).

Faculty Work Sample Review (FWSR). In the work samples, faculty found evidence that while student teaching in content area classrooms SDEP candidates had consulted with special educators and with ELL specialists about supports for students in their class and provided instructions and support to educational assistants. Candidates also maintained contact with students' parents via phone, email, conferences, and websites.

Interviews with supervisors (Int-S). University supervisors observed SDEP candidates in content area classrooms collaborating more with special educators and ELL specialists while also using educational assistants more effectively than candidates [in discrete secondary programs]. Supervisors attributed this to the multiple field experiences and collaboration coursework in the SDEP program. One supervisor said: "[SDEP candidates] have more experience working in teams, as opposed to meeting once a month in a general education curriculum committee. Teams concentrate on a plan to help individual students become more successful. The SDEP mindset is: 'how do I help each child be successful?' SDEP candidates also have opportunities to learn the role of educational assistants and experience working with and giving [them] direction."

School-wide program evaluation survey (SPES). Upon program completion, five of the 13 graduates who provided written comments said that the collaboration modeled by faculty and practiced with their peers was a valuable part of the program.

Interviews with graduates (Int-G). Some graduates in classroom and special education positions were actively coaching other content area teachers in how to differentiate and provide accommodations: "Teachers come to me and say 'What do I do? He's not reading, he's not writing,' so I show them [methods] that can help the kid but not give them the answer. Teachers crave the knowledge they didn't get when they were in school." Another commented: "The teacher I've been working with has been teaching for 34 years. There are a lot of kids with IEPs in her class and we really needed to do something [different]. I really commend her because she is ready to retire and has taken the time to restructure her entire approach." Referring to his preparation in SDEP, he continued: "you come in with a completely different mindset and you are ready to make it work from the beginning."

Interviews with principals (Int-P). Comments from principals who had hired SDEP graduates as content area teachers echoed those of the supervisors. One principal compared the preparation and subsequent readiness for collaborative roles of the SDEP graduate and general education graduates they had hired:

> [The SDEP graduate] has a comfort level in working with educational assistants and how to work with another adult in the room. A general education graduate doesn't know how to use the educational assistants to help the class. [The SDEP graduate] will sit down and make a plan right away. The assumption is made that the general education teacher is responsible for making that working relationship. [But] general education teacher programs don't teach about or give experience at this. [The SDEP graduate] was strategic about her expectations and sharing the curriculum plans with the assistants.

Two principals provided examples where they felt SDEP graduates helped content area teams consider the needs of struggling students as they made curricular decisions. The first involved providing ideas for supports that could be incorporated in a revision of the series of courses in algebra. The second involved changing the requirements and assessment of the senior project. The principal noted that the English teacher prepared in a merged program "is more proactive in scope and sequence, rather than reactive or passing the buck to the case manager. A dual-prepared teacher has the tools to figure out a different way for a kid to show mastery. [ ] She is an important voice in these meetings." These examples illustrate what graduates of merged programs might offer content-area teams in secondary schools.

Summary. Information from multiple sources suggests that SDEP graduates working as content area teachers initiated and engaged in collaboration with colleagues. Principals reported that graduates made useful contributions to content area teams that reflected their preparation in a merged program. Graduates reported that content area teachers appreciated and used their suggestions for differentiating instruction.

Discussion

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this initial evaluation of a merged secondary and special education teacher preparation program. Information regarding graduates came from relatively few (six) principals and administrators who were asked to participate because they had recently hired new teachers from both merged and discrete preparation programs. Although information was gathered through multiple methods and from multiple informants, this was not an independent evaluation but rather a self-study conducted by the faculty who had developed and provide the program.

Despite these limitations, this initial evaluation suggests that graduates of a merged secondary program developed competency in differentiated planning, assessment, and instruction in content area classrooms and embedded the provision of accommodations into their planning process. They also actively engaged in collaboration with their colleagues. The graduates of this merged program reported that learning a process for differentiated planning and instruction helped them to be successful first-year content-area teachers in diverse inclusive classrooms. Moreover, principals described graduates as able to differentiate for both high and low achievers.

What aspects of the merged program may have contributed to these findings? One possibility is that the program provided curricular coherence in which a clear focus and purpose connected a progression of learning experiences that built upon one another (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Candidates first learn to assess and consider the learning needs of every student in an actual classroom; to view learning diversity as a given that must be assessed and understood before one can plan instruction. Then candidates learn and practice skill areas that become components in an overall process of differentiated planning, instruction, and formative classroom assessment. Finally, they use the overall approach in a secondary general education class. Candidates also disaggregate and examine the assessment results from their final student teaching work sample in relation to their efforts to differentiate for advanced students, students with IEPs, English language learners, and all others in the class. They critique their own use of the process, including the practical considerations of incorporating it into one's work as a teacher. The merged program may provide candidates sufficient opportunities to implement and examine the results of differentiation such that it becomes their primary approach for planning content area instruction. (See Fullerton et. al., 2010 for program description).

Collaboration is another major focus of the program. Candidates are observers and participants in both the special education and general education systems and examine how well collaboration is working in various schools. They engage in collaboration 'from both sides' as a special education student teacher and as a secondary student teacher. This offers a rare vantage point for a teacher candidate that may help them develop a meta-view of the two systems without identifying exclusively with either. Some graduates who accepted traditional positions as

either a special educator or a content area teacher stated they did not identify with either of these roles as traditionally defined. Instead, they saw themselves as a bridge between special and general education on behalf of students and felt that collaboration skills were crucial to this role.

Future research of merged secondary programs will need to take many directions. Given their dual licensure, graduates of merged programs may become content area teachers, special educators, or accept blended assignments. While this initial evaluation focused on graduates who became content area teachers, more research is needed to explore how graduates of merged secondary programs who become special educators teach content to students in special education or serve as a learning specialist within content area teams. Some principals created and placed graduates in blended assignments, and further study is needed to explore the purpose and efficacy of these new positions. Finally, follow-up with graduates over a period of several years is needed to learn how their approach to planning, assessment, instruction, and collaboration evolves over time and whether this approach is associated with improved student achievement.

Note

We offer our sincere gratitude to the SDEP 2006-07 and 2008-09 cohorts for their passion and vision and their willingness to share their insights and experiences with us. We thank Dean Randy Hitz, Associate Dean Stephen Isaacson, Chairs Christine Chaille and Leslie Munson, and Cheryl Livneh and Leah Hershey of the Graduate School of Education for their guidance and support of the SDEP program.

References

Blanton, L. P., & Pugach, M. C. (2007). *Collaborative programs in general and special teacher education: An action guide for higher education and state policy makers.* Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Brouck, E. C. (2005). Secondary special educators: Perspectives of preservice preparation and satisfaction. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *28*(2), 125-139.

Brownell, M. T., Ross, D. D., Colon, E. P., & McCallum, C. L. (2005). Critical features of special education teacher preparation: A comparison with general teacher education. *The Journal of Special Education*, *38*(4), 242-252.

Bulgren, J. A. (2006). Integrated content enhancement routines: Responding to the needs of adolescents with disabilities in rigorous inclusive secondary content classes. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *38*(6), 54- 58.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher quality and student achievement. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, *8*(1). Retrieved January 21, 2009 from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1/

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*. San Francisco: Wiley Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Bransford, J. (Eds.) (2005). *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should know and be able to do*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dieker, Lisa M., & Berg, C. (2002) Collaborative program development between secondary

science, mathematics and special educators. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *25*(1), 92-99.

Fullerton, A. , Ruben, B., McBride, S., & Bert, S. (2011). Development and Design of a Merged Secondary and Special Education Teacher Education Program. *Teacher Education Quarterly, XX*(XX), XX-XX.

Gately, S., & Hammer, C. (2005). An exploratory case study of the preparation of secondary teachers to meet special education needs in the general classroom. *The Teacher Educator*, *40*(4), 238-256.

Griffin, C. C., & Pugach, M. C. (2007). Framing the progress of collaborative teacher education. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, *39*(6), 1-12.

Lenz, B. K., & Deshler, D. D. (2004). *Teaching content to all: Evidence-based inclusive practices in middle and secondary schools*. Boston: Pearson.

McClanahan. B. (2008). Help! I have kids who can't read in my world history class! *Preventing School Failure*, *53*(2), 105-111.

McHatton, P. A., & McCray, E. D. (2007). Inclination toward inclusion: Perceptions of elementary and secondary education teacher candidates. *Action in Teacher Education*, *29*(3), 25-32.

Ness, M. K. (2008). Supporting secondary readers: When teachers provide the "what" not the "how." *American Secondary Education*, *37*(1), 80-95.

Ruben, B., Fullerton, A., & Bert, S. (2009). *Innovation and reform in teacher preparation: AACTE's annual day on the hill* (pp. 74-75). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

SPeNSE. (2001). *General education teachers' role in special education*. Retrieved November 12, 2008 from http://ferdig.doe.ufl.edu/spense/gened11-29.pdf

Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classrooms*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Education/Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development College Textbook Series.

Turner, N. D. (2003). Preparing preservice teachers for inclusion in secondary classrooms. *Education*, *123*(3), 491-495.

Van Laarhoven, T. R., Munk, D. D., Lynch, K., Bosma, J., & Rouse, J. (2007). A model for preparing special and general education preservice teachers for inclusive education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *58*(5), 440-455.

Washburn-Moses, L. (2005). Preparing special educators for secondary positions. *Action in Teacher Education*, *27*(3), 26-39.

Waters, F. H., & Burcroff, T. L. (2007). Collaborative teaching at the university level: Practicing what is preached. *The Teacher Educator*, *42*(4), 304-315.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Profiles of general demographic characteristics: 2000 Census of population and Housing.* Retrieved May 10, 2009 from http://222.census.gov