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Peeking Inside Pandora's Box: One University's Journey into the Redesign of Teacher Educator Preparation

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In the last two decades, there have been various calls for reform in teacher education programs to address the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and students with disabilities. Consequently, many teacher education preparation programs are reviewing and redesigning their programs to meet the needs of the teacher of the 21st century. This manuscript will describe the development and implementation of a new certification program that integrates preservice teacher preparation, Special Education and English as a second language into a 123 hour degree program.

Keywords: ESL, special education, teacher education, collaboration

There are many variations of the Greek myth of Pandora who was given a box by Zeus and asked to never open it. In her haste to uncover the contents of the box, Pandora opened the box releasing hate, anger, sickness and every bad thing in the world. Pandora was able to slam the box lid trapping the last evil that remained in the box: hopelessness. So today, when everything seems to get tough, every human still has hope.

The state of teacher education is analogous to the myth of Pandora. Opening the box requires teacher educators to scrutinize teacher education in relation to the pressures of high stakes testing, the growth of alternative certification programs, the lack of funding, and the increasing diversity of the student population. While these obstacles seem insurmountable, teacher educators maintain hope and work to provide an education that prepares teacher candidates with the tools needed in the 21st century.

Critics of teacher education programs have argued that teacher education programs are not intellectually challenging and act as deterrents to young people entering the classroom (Fin & Kastoroom, 2000). There have been waves of national reform reports heralding the decline of teacher education: A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983); A Nation Prepared (Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986); A Call for Change in Teacher Education (National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education, 1985) and Doing What Matters Most (Darling- Hammond, 1997). Each of these national reports focuses on the need for a quality teaching force and on the appropriate preparation of teachers. In the last two decades, there have been various calls for reform in teacher education in order to meet the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and the increasing needs of students with disabilities placed in general education classrooms (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Consequently, many teacher education programs have now "opened" Pandora's box beginning the arduous task of reviewing and redesigning programs to meet the unique needs of the 21st century teacher. Crucial conversations are beginning to take place among faculty, requiring them to question their own practices and to think and lead boldly to prepare culturally responsive teachers.

The landscape facing the future educator of the 21st century is daunting. Twenty-five percent of students live in poverty; 10-20% have identified learning

difficulties; 15 % speak a language other than English; and about 40% are members of minority groups, many of them recent immigrants from other countries (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In order to meet the pressing needs of the 21st century educator, schools of education must break out of the factory, or "egg carton" model of preservice educator preparation (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2007).

Darling-Hammond (2006) noted the restructuring of teacher preparation programs must help teacher candidates "understand a deeply wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teachers should be able to enact those understandings in complex classrooms" (p. 3). Schools of education cannot continue to operate using the same outdated policies and programs. Restructuring of teacher preparation programming must occur to prepare professionals to arrive at their respective schools ready to work, not practice. This requires schools of education to examine curriculum frameworks and assessments and understand what they imply for teaching and for learning to teach (Boe & Cook, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). These fundamental reforms will deeply impact the role of general educators, who now have taken over many of the responsibilities that were once the purview of Special Education and ESL teachers. Policymakers and researchers recognize a need for a new breed of teacher, yet few articles have been published regarding designing teacher candidate programs to prepare this new type of educator.

The teacher of the 21st century must realize that basic skills are necessary but not sufficient for the 21st century learner. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) recommends a specific framework that can be used to develop a vision for student success. The Partnership notes that the teacher of the 21st century must blend content knowledge with the essential skills needed in today's world including critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration. Based on the recommendation of The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009), teacher educator preparation programs should strive to devise a sequence of courses that adequately prepare teacher candidates to meet these essential skills. This will require teacher preparation programs to examine current policies, procedures, and standards.

Segregation of instructional divisions (i.e. regular education and Special Education) within teacher education programs at the university perpetuates the idea that certain types of students need specially trained teachers (Piper, 2007). This belief causes some educators to excuse themselves from teaching all students and some institutes of higher education to maintain the status quo. Integrated teacher preparation is one way that universities can seek to prepare teacher candidates to meet the unique needs of the 21st century student. Piper noted, "It stands

to reason that if we create integrated learning opportunities for students of all ages, our professions and society may become more accepting of differences" (p. 176). Additionally, programs that seek to increase the number of teachers with English as a Second Language (ESL) and Special Education certifications may assist in addressing the chronic shortage of teachers with these specializations and may impact the academic success of students. In this article, we describe the process devised by The University of Texas at Tyler to develop and implement a new pre-service teacher preparation program integrating general teacher preparation coursework, Special Education coursework and English as a Second Language (ESL) coursework into a 123 hour degree program. Courses in each of the areas prepare students to take examinations required for certification.

Background

The University of Texas at Tyler (UT Tyler) is located in the northeastern part of Texas. The College of Education and Psychology at The University of Texas at Tyler was restructured in 2008. Prior to this restructuring, the College comprised 4 separate academic units: (1) Curriculum and Instruction, (2) Educational Leadership, (3) Early Childhood, Reading, and Special Education, and (4) Psychology and Counseling. In the fall of 2008, the School of Education (SOE) was created merging Curriculum and Instruction and Early Childhood, Reading and Special Education into one instructional department. The School of Education provides undergraduate and graduate programs. Undergraduate students within the SOE who planned to work in elementary schools specialized in a Bachelors of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies degree and were able to be certified to teach in Early Childhood through grade 4 (EC-4) prior to the initial restructuring of the program. These EC-4 students who also wanted be certified in Special Education or ESL either took supplemental courses at the end of their program or simply waited until they graduated and took the certification exams without any coursework or field experience in these specializations. In Texas, any fully certified teacher can become certified to teach ESL or Special Education simply by passing the required state exams.

In 2009, the 81st Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 174 which mandated the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) make available via a website, the extent to which teacher education programs prepare teachers including general and Special Education teachers to effectively teach students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. This requirement impacts all preservice educator programs in the state. Not unlike other states, SBEC encouraged universities and colleges to seek ways to implement ESL and Special Education preparation as part of teacher preparation. The SOE at The University of Texas at Tyler viewed this mandate from the State of Texas as a catalyst

to review our current teacher education program and to open dialogue between faculty members. From this dialogue, an initiative to develop a new teacher preparation program blending ESL, Special Education and general teacher preparation (Early Childhood through Grade 6) was formulated.

The remainder of the article focuses on the process we followed to integrate courses, the lessons learned as a result of the process, and recommendations we have for institutions of higher education beginning this journey.

Impetus for Change

The change process at The University of Texas at Tyler commenced following the review of online survey data conducted with teacher candidates who had graduated from the teacher educator program along with surveys of stakeholders in the community (administrators, teachers, parents, and business leaders). The survey data indicated that graduates and constituents wanted the teacher educator program to provide more instruction in areas that would prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of all children in the general education classroom; this included students with cultural and linguistic differences and those with disabilities and other diverse needs.

After reviewing survey data, we examined the demographics of teacher candidates enrolled in the School of Education. As noted in Figure I, the School of Education population is predominately female and Caucasian.

Next, we reviewed demographic and programmatic data from the Texas Education Agency which succinctly showed an increasing diverse population of students being served in Bilingual, ESL and Special Education programs. This data is provided in Figure 2.

The information gleaned from the survey, along with the subsequent review of the teacher education program demographics, state programmatic data and a review of research (Brown, Welsh, Hill, & Cipko, 2008; Goodwin, 2002; Neisler, 2000; Nieto, 2000), supported and validated the urgent need to revise the program to prepare teacher candidates to effectively meet the diverse learning needs of students in the general education classroom.

The revision of the teacher education program required a group of individuals willing to devote time and expertise. Ultimately, the committee consisted of the Director of the School of Education, two faculty from elementary education, two faculty with Special Education training, and two faculty members with an understanding of ESL training and issues. We established a timeline goal of completing the entire process of change and new program approval within one year. We met weekly for several hours during the fall semester, hammering out all of the details for a new program.

After reviewing all of the data, the idea of developing a single program that would lead to graduates being able to obtain certification in three areas - Early Childhood through Grade 6 (EC-6) Generalist, Special Education, and English as a Second Language - was born. Since the State of Texas does not specify specific course content leading to certification, we were committed to developing courses which would prepare teacher candidates to meet the diverse learning needs of 21st century students and to pass the examinations for the EC-6 Generalist and the all level certification exams for ESL and Special Education. During this review of data, we volunteered for various responsibilities and brought new information to the table at each meeting.

Total	Male	Female	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Native American
217	5	212	15	3	19	177	3

Figure 1. Enrollment Totals for School of Education Teacher Candidates.

Enrollment	LEP Students	Bilingual Students	ESL Students	Economically-Disadvantaged Students	Title I Students	Special Education Students
4,998,579	838,418	496,047	313,807	3,013,442	3,298,934	440,744

Figure 2. Total Enrollment Counts in Student Programs (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

The data we gathered addressed these questions:
- What kinds of programs and certifications are offered by other major higher education institutions in the state?
- How much coursework in Special Education and ESL is required in the existing programs?
- How many semester credit hours (SCHs) are other teacher educator programs requiring?
- What are the standards for the certification examination for ESL and Special Education?

Once this data was obtained and examined, syllabi for all of the courses within The University of Texas at Tyler's existing programs were obtained. Because it was necessary to reduce the number of existing courses offered in order to add all of the information related specifically to ESL and Special Education, we examined syllabi for commonalities and redundancy. Committee members reviewed courses to ascertain if any courses could be combined. We also considered adjusting the number of SCHs allotted to some of the courses. The challenge was to include all of the content information needed for the two additional certifications without going substantially over the desired 120 SCHs total for a degree program.

The EC-6 Planning Committee met with the entire SOE faculty late in the semester and presented a goal for the program and the data findings that led to the recommendation of a combined program. The entire faculty unanimously agreed to move forward with the development of the new combined program. In the spring, serious work on syllabi revision, course combining, and course reduction began. We examined state certification requirements for each of the three programs and determined which courses addressed each of those requirements. For courses that could be combined, faculty members who taught similar courses were asked to collaborate and develop a syllabus, which would address all of the content the students needed. Moreover, we maintained fidelity to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards in syllabi development.

Once all courses were examined, and the necessary revisions and adjustments were made, we developed three different options to present to the SOE faculty for consideration. Each option varied slightly in the number of courses and the manner in which some of the concepts would be addressed. At that meeting, the SOE faculty determined that the proposal that required 123 SCHs was the one that they wanted to submit to the Texas Education Agency's State Board of Education Certification (SBEC) for approval. This proposal increased the number of courses for Special Education and ESL to include the following: Introduction to Special Populations, Language and Literacy Acquisition, Managing Classrooms and Behavior in School Settings,

Assessment for Instruction, Instructing Diverse Learners, English Language Learners and Collaborating with Families and Community. These courses were developed based on best practice and standards required by the Texas Examination of Educator Standards (TExES) and INTASC. In addition to the new courses, modules related to Special Education and ESL were developed to be implemented throughout the education curriculum. These modules examined topics including diversity, language differences vs. learning disabilities, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

The new combined EC-6 program was approved, requiring the EC-6 Committee to start to address issues related to implementation of the new program while allowing existing students to complete the previous program. An issue that we examined closely was how field experiences would be provided, for faculty members and the community desired a field-based program with significant numbers of hours of field. We continued to meet in late spring and summer in order to make these determinations.

The SOE offered the initial courses for the first phase of the program in fall, 2011. The full implementation of the program began in spring, 2012. Due to reduced funding from the State of Texas, no additional monies were available to implement the new program; that means no additional staff members were hired.

The implementation has not been without a few complications as an existing program was phased out and the new one started. Input thus far, from teacher candidates and community stakeholders, has suggested that this combined program is one that is highly desired by the constituents of The University of Texas at Tyler.

Implementing the New Program

Successful implementation of the new teacher preparation program was achieved based on three critical variables. These variables included (1) personnel, (2) open lines of communication and (3) organizing courses into a phase structure.

In addition to the Director of the School of Education and the full-time faculty members in the program, key positions aided students in the progression through the educational phases. These positions included a single advisor for all teacher education certification programs, a clinical experiences supervisor and a certification officer. Faculty members served as Phase team leaders and meet periodically to discuss specific needs of students and to discuss required updates in each of their respective areas. Generally, the transition to the new program has been implemented via an established framework specifically aimed at addressing any student and faculty concerns.

Communication was a second key variable necessary for successful implementation of the new program. Communication included, but was not limited to:

- a very detailed on-line student handbook;
- student e-mails;
- orientations for each phase;
- phase meetings with student elected representatives;
- BlackBoard communications set up and color coded for each phase; and
- announcements and updates posted on Blackboard.

A third key element that has made the transition successful is the fact that the teacher education program is made up of four distinct phases. Each phase has specific requirements that must be completed prior to progressing to the next phase, including a specific course sequence and key assessments.

Phase 1 is comprised of 21 SCHs. The course content for Phase I comprises introductory courses such as Introduction to the Teaching Profession and Introduction to Special Populations. Successful completion of this phase, along with key assessments, is required prior to admission to the teacher education program.

Phase 2 occurs following admission to the teacher education program. Within this phase, students fulfill a requirement of 15 SCHs and are required to complete 30 hours of field experience. Some of the courses comprising this phase include Managing Classrooms and Behavior in School Settings, Teaching Skills and Assessment for Instruction. Students successfully complete Phase 2 when all courses, field experiences, and assessment have been completed with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5.

In Phase 3, teacher candidates complete courses in methods of teaching math, science, social studies and language arts. In addition, 60 hours of field experience are required for this phase. To move to the final phase, students must successfully complete courses, key assessments, field experience and maintain a GPA of 2.5.

Phase 4 is the culminating clinical experience in which teacher candidates student teach for a full semester. The teacher candidate has the opportunity to observe a teacher and students, plan lessons and assess student learning and eventually take on the responsibility of full day teaching. Teacher candidates are required to be observed on three separate occasions by university superiors and must have a rating of proficient on each evaluation. Students are allowed to apply for certification following student teaching and successful completion of the TExEs, the state certification examination.

A key component to each phase is the Student Advisory Council (SAC). The SAC is comprised of student elected representatives and faculty that meet twice a semester to discuss any concerns. This communication has allowed for changes in the phases as needed and provided a conduit for student concerns to be addressed in an effective and timely manner.

Lessons Learned

The transition from a generic EC-6 program to a focused EC-6 Special Education/ESL program was not an overnight process. During the review of the program, we discovered considerable overlap in course content. While some overlap was essential for building and developing concepts, most courses were adapted, combined, or deleted. Only a few new courses were added. As the planning continued, presenting the information to the faculty incrementally, rather than all at once, allowed for input and aided in securing approval from all faculty members.

Once the program changes were approved, it was necessary to review the qualifications of faculty in order to assign faculty to courses. Certification and experience in the course content was critical. The Director of the School of Education reviewed the background and experience of the faculty and began the necessary steps to have faculty members teach courses they had never taught before. During this review, it became clear that some courses like the Assessment for Instruction course, required faculty members with expertise in Special Education, general education and ESL assessments. With no one faculty member qualified to provide the in-depth instruction needed in all three areas, the decision was made to team teach this course with specialists from each area working together to provide quality instruction. Three faculty members were chosen to teach the Assessment in Instruction course. The team included a Reading instructor, Special Education instructor and an instructor with specialization in ESL. The instructors developed a common syllabus. Each instructor taught for a total of 5 weeks. During this time, the Reading instructor focused on reading assessments, particularly running records. The ESL instructor devoted instructional time to explaining the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and the related assessments while the Special Education instructor focused instruction in the area of curriculum based assessment (CBM) and basis descriptive statistics. In addition, on-going professional development, especially in the areas of Special Education and ESL, were needed for all faculty members to provide program alignment and cohesion. This was achieved through on-going presentations during faculty meetings and distribution of current research articles.

Transitioning from the old program to the new program has not been without difficulties. The year after the change, some students were enrolled in the old program while students just starting were beginning the new program. This provided a challenge in scheduling because some courses moved from one phase to another. In addition, the faculty was teaching in multiple phases and with variations of similar courses. For example, in the

old program the course on integrating the arts was in the second phase. In the new program, it is in the first phase and includes integrating physical education as well as the arts. Although the courses are similar, with the additional course requirements, the course had to be redesigned.

With the same faculty member teaching both courses, this put an unforeseen strain on scheduling. In order to address the issues that arose from implementing the new program, the Director of the School of Education instituted Phase team meetings. Since students took courses in certain blocks or phases, the Director selected a faculty member from each phase to serve as the Phase Team leader. Additionally, a student representative from each section of each course in the phase was elected by the students in the course to serve as the student advisory member to the Phase team. During these meetings, students and faculty discuss concerns such as scheduling, course requirements, key assessments and other pertinent issues. Following the completion of the meeting, each Phase team leader compiles the issues discussed and meets with the Director. These meetings have proven to be productive and instrumental in the change process. For example, student representatives noted a need for better communication regarding the course requirements between the new EC-6, ESL and Special Education Certification program and the old EC-4 program. From these discussions, faculty members were able to dispel the confusion students were experiencing.

In addition to scheduling conflicts and designing new courses, during the implementation phase, it became apparent to us that work on horizontal and vertical alignment was needed. To ensure the quality and rigor of instruction, we examined each course to determine if the standards are being introduced or developed and to what degree of rigor. It was during this period that ESL and Special Education modules were embedded as components of the other coursework. As a result of revising our program, we have learned the following:
- Start crucial conversations early.
- Disseminate information in incremental steps.
- Include key personnel from EC-6, Special Education and ESL in planning.
- Review current program and courses for overlap and similarities.
- Plan using standards (InTASC & State standards).
- Place the needs of the students first.
- Review the qualifications needed for faculty for each course.
- Provide on-going professional development for all faculty.
- Ensure vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum.
- Keep quality and rigor high.

Recommendations
Growing pains are a normal part of any change.

Keeping an open mind and being flexible and willing to grow with the program are essential to a smooth transition. If the needs of the students are in the forefront of the planning process and the faculty is committed to the essential components of the program, the transition from one program to the next will be easier. Some recommendations we have for universities considering the implementation of a program change to include General Education (EC-6), ESL and Special Education are:
- Examine the needs of your stakeholders to determine if it is appropriate.
- Review your current program and the standards needed for the new program.
- Hold crucial conversations early and frequently to ensure faculty support.
- Include pivotal personnel in planning.
- Keep egos in check – everyone must understand that the students' needs supersede the faculty's specializations or favorite courses.
- Understand that it is a process and that planning is only the beginning.
- Be willing to adjust the plan once implementation starts to ensure a smooth transition.

Change is never easy, but it is often worth the effort. Having gone through the growing pains that accompanied this new program change, teacher candidates at The University of Texas at Tyler are becoming increasingly aware of the need to understand how to work with diverse populations. Faculty members have weathered the small storm of change and the subsequent rebuilding process. The University of Texas at Tyler education program is stronger than ever before. The faculty and students are now appropriately prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It is worth the risk to open Pandora's Box occasionally, for out of the chaos, change and growth can occur, especially when the end result is a new program that better prepares teacher candidates to meet the needs of all students in the general education setting. Despite the criticism faced by teacher preparation programs, hope remains. It is hope for the next generation of teachers that prompts teacher education preparation programs to retool and revise to meet the changing demands of the profession.

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