Merging Secondary & Special Education Teacher Preparation

Ann Fullerton, Barbara Ruben, Sue Bert, Stephanie McBride
Portland State University

Webinar on Secondary Dual Certification
Sponsored by Office of Special Education Programs
US Department of Education
June 17, 2011
Secondary Dual Educator Program (SDEP)
Initial Licensure with Dual Endorsements in a Subject Area and Special Education
Graduate School of Education
“...I want to be able to teach every student who walks into my science class, can you teach me to do that?...”

- Applicant
Portland State University
Graduate School of Education

- Urban campus
- Partner with 24+ LEAs (urban/suburban)
- Largest school of education in Oregon
- Prepare 300 general educators per year
- Prepare 100 special educators per year
- Prepare 25 dually endorsed elementary/special educators and 30 dually endorsed secondary/special educators every 2 years
Merged Programs at PSU

- Fit definition of merged teacher preparation (Blanton & Pugach, 2007)
- Inclusive Elementary Educators Program began in 1997
- Today’s focus: **Secondary Dual Educator Program (SDEP)** began in 2006
- We concur with Blanton & Pugach: “Dual” misrepresents merged programs
Developing the Program

- In 2004, 3 secondary and 4 special education faculty discussed concerns and feedback
- Agreed to meet for 12 months to co-create a merged program
- PATH planning process (O'Brien, Pearpoint, and Kahn, 2010)
- Input from LEA colleagues
- Established common goals
- Curriculum mapping
Goals of SDEP Program

Develop strategic teachers with the versatility to meet the learning needs of all secondary students. Prepare teachers who are able to:

1) Teach from a strong content knowledge foundation utilizing specialized content-specific methods
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
Secondary Dual Educator Program

GOAL: Independent Adolescent Learners

Content Knowledge

Collaboration & Leadership

Instructional Skills

Classroom Experiences
Curriculum Coherence: *Identity as inclusive secondary educator*

- Exceptional teacher education programs provide a coherent curriculum delineating the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to teach effectively (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005)
- Cohort model
- Use content enhancement (Lenz & Deschler, 2004) to guide faculty, supervisors, and candidates
Secondary Dual Educator Program

- Two years full-time (6 terms)
- Field experience every term, including 3 student teaching with work samples

**Results in:**
- Initial teaching license with middle and high school endorsement in content area.
- Initial teaching license in secondary special education (grade 5 – age 21) (non-categorical)
- *Highly qualified: 9-12th grade inclusive content classes*
- Master’s of Education degree
Teaching Positions of Graduates

When SDEP graduates were first hired...

- 53% were special educators (transition specialist, learning specialist, life skills, behavior support)

- 26% were fulltime content are teachers (language arts, math, science & art)

- 21% were in blended positions (science/SPED, language arts/SPED, art/SPED, math/SPED, social studies/SPED)
Hiring reflects versatility

• Content Area Teachers
• Special Education Teachers
• Blended positions teaching across SPED and content areas
• Positions with co-teaching responsibilities
• Alternative settings
• Graduates have sustained positions through downsizing
Content Area Preparation

As undergraduate SDEP applicants:
• Complete 24-60 credits in content area
• Pass content area exam

During the SDEP program:
SDEP candidates take 2 subject-matter pedagogy courses with other secondary candidates in same content area
Ongoing cycle of ask questions, gather input, make changes, assess impact.

Example:

• First cohort said “I wish I had special education skills before I taught a whole class”.
• This led to change in program sequence.
• Now some special education coursework/field work before teaching in content area.
• Result: Improved classroom management and differentiation as student teachers in inclusive content area classes.
Important Program Components

- ‘Border crossing’ in merged field experiences
- Strong preparation in literacy
- Learn process for differentiated planning, assessment, and instruction
- Collaboration & co-teaching
- ‘Bookends’ research courses
‘Border Crossing’ in Merged Field Experiences

- Placed in one school for a year with a special educator and content area teacher
- Work with same students as their special education and their content area student teacher
- Engage in special-general education collaboration from “both sides”
Strong Preparation in Literacy

*Prepare teachers who:*

- Teach reading skills to struggling readers
- Support content-area literacy for students with IEPs and for EL learners

*Multiple courses and practicum/student teaching:*

- Progression from teaching small group to whole inclusive classroom
- Learn multiple methods for literacy instruction
One principal assigned a SDEP graduate to teach both a structured reading program and Advanced Placement English:

“She [teaches] classes that are at the extremes. She can keep them engaged and on task to get ready for the AP exam. 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.”
Differentiate: Assess, Plan, Instruct

- Know every student: surveys, reading level, create student profiles
- Consult with Special Ed. and ESL colleagues
- Plan with accommodations in mind
- Frequent assessment guides instruction
- Differentiated learning objectives, assignments, materials
- UDL, content enhancement, literacy support
- Disaggregate pre/post test scores
Principals who hired graduates said:

“She 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.”

 “[She has] the ability to read learning differences more quickly than teachers [prepared in discrete programs].”

“I see a lot more scaffolding to support learning.”

“[The SDEP graduate] can break down the content for any kid who is struggling to learn.”
Graduates said:

“\textquote{In a class of 24, I’ve got 3 who need advanced material and 4 who I need to modify a lot for and everything in-between. But I am comfortable with it which I probably would not be if I had not been in this program.}”

“\textquote{[When I plan] I think about where everybody’s at and come up with an objective and think about how to get all the kids there.}”

“I have learned how to teach without taking content away.”
Collaboration

- 3 courses with assignments in every term in schools
- Collaborate in the role of special educator and the role of content area teacher
- Co-teach with cooperating teacher in second year
- Collaboration for transition planning, with family, student, and agencies
“You come in with a completely different mindset ready to make [collaboration] work from the beginning.” – Graduate

“She advocates for and provides examples of how to help all students reach the standard. She speaks up about accommodations and wants to have forethought before teaching, not just on the spot remediation.” – Principal
Supervisors said:

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

“The SDEP program may create teachers who take the lead in promoting high expectations for all students and not just writing off students with special needs.”
‘Bookends’ research courses

• Research course in first term: Become informed consumers of research
• Faculty can then delve into research base for practices in each course
• Research course in final term: Explore topic of interest through action research during final student teaching
References


References


Secondary Dual Educator Program Web Page

http://www.pdx.edu/ceed/secondary-dual-educator-program

(includes video interviews with graduates and program faculty)