Success in High-Need Schools Journal
Volume 4, #3

Theme: "Meeting the Challenges of Special Education in High-Need Schools"

Introduction

This issue of Success in High-Need Schools is devoted to special education. The articles provide case studies of ACI member institutions that have recently developed multi-categorical certification programs with support from a multi-year 2004 ACI grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. The FIPSE grant enabled the Center to create the Illinois Special Education Collaborative (ISPED), a network of ACI member special educators and school partners working together to address the shortage of special education teachers, especially in Illinois high-need schools. Guest columns by state superintendent Chris Koch and special education teacher Marlo Sails add important commentary.

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Message from the Director: Illinois Special Education Collaborative (I-SPED), *by Jan Fitzsimmons, Ph.D.*

Many years ago I prepared to be a special education teacher. Even in those bygone days, the need for special educators was so great that I graduated on a Friday and began work on the very next Monday. My work began in a resource classroom where I taught students pulled out of their regular classrooms to work on particular skills for specific amounts of time, as designated on their individualized education plans (IEP). My case load was composed of 40 students, drawn evenly from two schools. I went to both schools daily. My students were categorized as learning disabled and behavior disordered — although I often thought perhaps I was a little bit of both as I learned to navigate the waters of my first teaching position.

The years have passed, and many changes have been implemented to improve teaching and learning for students with special needs. However, a critical issue remains — the dire shortage of special education teachers. The Associated Colleges of Illinois' (ACI) Center for Success in High-Need Schools is taking action to address this concern.

Consider the following steps:
First, in fall 2004, with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) Fund for Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), ACI's Center launched the Illinois Special Education Collaborative (I-SPED), a curriculum development initiative to increase the number of highly qualified special education teachers for Illinois' high-need schools. Through collaboration with high-need school partners and the Center, four ACI colleges that previously had no special education programs developed multicategorical programs. This collaboration is permanently impacting Illinois' supply of highly qualified special education teachers in metropolitan Chicago, central Illinois, and Metro-East St. Louis by increasing partner institutions' capacity to offer certification programs.

Second, a network of ACI colleges began conversations about how to improve the quality of their programs. It soon became clear that there was more work to do, so the Center drafted a second proposal that was funded by the USDOE Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), which began October 2008. Five colleges have agreed to forge a new collaboration – Transforming Special Education Curricula, known as T-SPED, which will: 1) improve content knowledge in math and science; 2) provide evidenced-based instruction in core subjects for special education students; 3) integrate Response to Intervention (RtI) approaches to special education curricula; and 4) engage pre-service special education teachers in effective clinical experiences in high-need schools, where special education teacher shortages are the worst.

In this issue of Success in High Need Schools, we share articles and columns that chronicle the results of these important Center-related initiatives, which are significantly affecting both the special education field and the supply of special educators with multicategorical certification.

Therese Hogan of Dominican University explains a critical tug-of-war between breadth and depth of education, as she chronicles the preparation of teachers who will meet the needs of special learners. Professor Hogan describes four major influences that challenge teacher educators who prepare candidates for the special education classroom: 1) change from categorical to multicategorical certification; 2) inclusion; 3) federal legislation (including NCLB, IDEA, IDEA '04); and 4) implementation of evidence-based practices. Each of these movements has caused major shifts in preparing teachers. Hogan suggests, however, that we look at change as growth and preserve order through reflection and informed decisions. Hogan hopes we look at what our candidates do in the classroom and learn from them so that we can better prepare their successors.

State Superintendent **Chris Koch** urges educators to implement sound teaching and learning practices for all students. Specifically, he encourages educators to implement data-based interventions consistent with the RtI initiative. Koch's message is clear: All teacher candidates must not only be familiar with, but skilled at, implementing the tenets of individualized instruction.

Pamela Jessee's article is a condensed course that might be labeled "RtI 101." In her article, Jesse explains the critical attributes that define RtI. While we include it in this issue of the Center's online journal focused on special education, Jesse is quick to point out that RtI is not just a special education initiative.

Anne Deeter's article describes how change in policy affects not only K-12 schools, teachers, and learners, but higher education. It points to the increasing need for a P-20 vision and for K-12 and higher education to work together to solve pressing challenges in education. Deeter summarizes teacher educators' needs for critical professional development to prepare candidates for an ever demanding classroom, as documented by a survey of special education teacher educators.

In **Marlo Sails'** column, we hear the voice of a recently prepared practitioner. Her words reveal the path of a career changer destined to teach. Marlo describes how inspiring children and education transformed her life.

George Fero and Barbara Thomas (McKendree University in Lebanon, IL) and **Kathleen Bradley** (Aurora University in Aurora, IL) recount their experiences in developing special education programs on their respective campuses. Bradley describes how Aurora's program grew from a response to the critical shortage of special educators and an understanding of the influences and issues that produce the shortage. Fero and Thomas share McKendree's story of how collaboration among universities, colleges, and the Associated Colleges of Illinois paved the way for effective program development, and how the resulting program increased the number of special education teachers in high-need schools.

It is our sincere hope that this collection of articles will help campuses to prepare a new corps of excellent special educators who will address the challenges of students in the schools that need them most. Key to addressing the most pressing issues is collaboration among colleges and universities, which can lead to sustainable change. ACI's Center is here to assist and support such collaborative endeavors.

Author Bio: Jan Fitzsimmons is director of the Associated Colleges of Illinois (ACI) Center for Success in High-Need Schools and publisher of *Success in High-Need Schools Journal.* She may be contacted at jfitzsimmons@acifund.org.

The Times are A-Changin': What This Means for Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs, *by Therese F. Hogan*

Author Bio

Therese has served as director of the graduate programs in special education at Dominican University for over 11 years. Therese also teaches special education coursework at both the graduate and undergraduate levels for both general education and special education teacher education candidates. Prior to her work in teacher education, Therese taught students with disabilities at the K-8 level. Therese has done a numerous professional development videos, international, national and local presentations for professional organizations as well as a significant number of in-services for teachers all across the country on various topics including: collaboration and co-teaching, instructional strategies in reading and writing, and modifications to academic instruction for students with disabilities.

Abstract
This article examines a variety of factors that have affected the preparation of teacher educators in special education in recent years. These developments include local certification changes, influences of federal laws, and evolving school practices. The article explores the current or potential impact of each element on the design and content of special education teacher preparation programs. Within this changing climate, certain constants are identified that are fundamental to teacher education in special education.

Introduction
Teacher preparation in special education always has posed distinct challenges.

It requires preparation for multiple roles and a significant range of skills and expertise. Traditionally, this area has had a continual shortage of teachers and sometimes high rates of burnout. Due to the diversity and range of students served and the influence of ongoing research on effective practice, the field imposes a continuous learning curve on special educators who must increase their understanding of disabilities and develop effective research-based pedagogies to meet student needs. There also are federal and state laws, mandates, and guidelines that directly influence practices, as well as the varied daily procedures and policies within individual districts and schools. Pressures have increased to design programs that provide an adequate supply of special educators to meet rising national expectations of special education teacher educators (Smith, 2006).

Still, within this rapidly evolving and changing environment, there are constants in special education as important as the new demands. If teacher educators are to prepare effective and responsive special education teachers, they must continue to be knowledgeable, skilled, proactive in their approaches, and responsive to the constant demand to grow professionally and "stay on their toes." Teacher educators long have known, but it has never been truer than today, that learning and skill development cannot stop; learning has just begun as candidates leave the doors of their respective colleges and universities and enter the professional world of teaching.

A Few Sources of Influence
Special education teacher preparation experiences include numerous and ongoing influences, each bringing the potential for multiple changes in the manner in which special education teachers are prepared. Four major influences of the past decade illustrate the challenges that designers of teacher education programs face:

1. The change from single to multicategorical certification

Certification structures vary from state to state with respect to special education certification. In 2002, with the creation of the Learning Behavior Specialist I certificate, Illinois moved from categorical certification to multicategorical certification. This certificate enables the holder to teach students across grade levels (elementary, middle school, and high school) who have a wide range of disabilities: learning disabilities, social/emotional disorders, intellectual disability (mental retardation), autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments such as attention deficit disorder, and orthopedic impairments. The move from categorical to multicategorical certification has had profound impact on the preparation of special educators.

Although many teacher education programs in Illinois were designed to offer teachers certification in more than one disability area prior to 2002, most required redesign after the multicategorical state certification regulations were adopted in order to prepare candidates who were qualified to teach students with all of these disabilities. This meant changes in coursework, field experiences, and clinical practice. The scope of study for candidates in special education teacher preparation programs expanded significantly to ensure that candidates gain both the increased range of knowledge and research related to the disabilities themselves and the broader range of pedagogy and interventions necessary to address the variety and severity of disabilities and grade levels. The breadth vs. depth tug of war is a struggle in which many teacher educators find themselves immersed. Adequate coverage of multiple disability areas and severity levels across 12+ grade levels and pedagogies required for the great variety of academic, behavioral, social, physical, and other needs is indeed a challenge. Field experiences also needed to be expanded to include work with students across the multiple disability areas and grade ranges.

It is important to consider that teacher preparation is not only done at the undergraduate level within a four-year time frame. Increasingly, colleges and universities are offering special education teacher preparation programs at the graduate level. This means coursework is taken within a shorter time frame, with students often attending part time. These factors add to the challenge of providing the appropriate breadth and depth of knowledge and skills and the range of field experiences required to educate an effective special education teacher. This depth of content and pedagogy speaks to the importance of mentoring and support for new teachers. Moreover, learning and skill development beyond the formal teacher education program is necessary for special educators to gain further specialization in methodology and instructional supports for students with disabilities.

The Influence of Inclusion

The practice of inclusion in schools is certainly more than a decade old and, as it is realized and refined in more and more schools and with a wider population of students with disabilities, its influence on teacher education is ever present. The 2007Annual report to Congress on the Implementation of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reported, “In 2003, 96% of students with disabilities were educated in regular school buildings. However, the time they spent in regular classrooms varied. Almost half of all students with disabilities (49.9%) were educated for most of their school day in the regular classroom; that is, they were outside the regular classroom for less than 21% of the school day” (US Dept. of Education, 2007, p.43). This increase in inclusive settings means that general educators and special educators co-teach and collaborate in the same space and that general educators have become more involved in the special education process, including participation in individual education plan (IEP) meetings and developing and implementing modifications.

In a review of research on placement and its influence on student achievement, Zigmond (2003) indicates that the research has not been conclusive with respect to which placement serves students best. Zigmond also points out, “The bedrock of special education is instruction focused on individual needs. The very concept of ‘one best place’ contradicts this commitment to individualization” (p. 197). While the number of students educated within the general education classroom setting has increased steadily over the years, federal regulations still require consideration of the “least restrictive environment” and the opportunity for the full continuum of placements.

Factors such as a continuum of placements and consideration of the least restrictive environment influence many aspects of teacher education programs in special education. First, they mean that teacher educators must be prepared to work within a variety of service delivery models including inclusive, resource/pull-out, and instructional/self-contained classrooms, as well as special schools/classrooms. This is in addition to preparing teachers in special education, as is true for general education candidates, to work within urban, suburban, and rural settings. Teachers in all settings need to share a commitment to research-based pedagogy and to instruct students within the general education curriculum, although the nuances and challenges of implementation are different across these settings. Remaining committed to the goals within the student's IEP and attentive to each student's specific needs, while working within a general education classroom and within the general education curriculum, can be a challenging balancing act that special education teachers are asked to perform from the start of their careers. Inclusive settings have added additional skill demands and skill emphasis. Increased and more direct work with general education teachers requires collaboration skills and greater emphasis on effective communication skills. Co-teaching, a common practice in inclusive settings, requires another level of skills for both special education and general education teachers. Some teacher education programs have responded by combining general education and special education teacher candidates in multiple courses at the preservice level. If collaborative frameworks can be explored during teacher preparation, there is a better chance that this collaboration will be better facilitated in actual classroom/school settings. It would seem to make little sense to wait to do this at the in-service level only.

Working with students in inclusive settings often requires a different skill set and has increased the emphasis on the special education teacher's ability to provide accommodations and effective and meaningful adaptations to the general education classroom environment, procedures, instruction, assignments, and materials. This includes selection of assistive technology and the necessary assistance and preparation for students to utilize this technology. Determination of appropriate modifications to increase access to the general education curriculum has become a key component of the IEP and relates to both classroom instruction and state and district assessments (Thompson et. al., 2006). The planning, implementation, and monitoring of the effectiveness of modifications across domains (academic, cognitive, behavioral), and the use of assistive technology are critical skill sets for today's special education teacher educators.

As teacher educators, we also must realize that our teacher candidates are increasingly individuals who likely have been educated in inclusive classroom settings. They have "lived" the mixing of general and special education students and thus bring to their teacher preparation a perspective that many of their professors do not have. This should be seen as a valuable learning tool for all.

The Influence of NCLB, IDEA, and IDEA 04

As one considers the federal influence, it is important to recognize that it and other influences overlap. The multiple reauthorizations of IDEA have introduced a wide range of changes: for example, disability categories and increased emphasis on access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Clearly, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, specifically IDEA 04, has been a source of multiple new considerations for teacher educators. Each speaks to changes in practice in the field and new demands on those who serve students with disabilities.

While the impact of NCLB and IDEA/IDEA 04 are myriad, four particular impacts are considered here: 1) access to the general education curriculum and increased emphasis on standards-based education; 2) adequate yearly progress requirements (AYP); 3) highly qualified requirements; and 4) implementation of evidence based practices.

Access to the General Education Curriculum/Standards Based Education and AYP

Provision of access to the general education curriculum speaks to teacher practice no matter what the service delivery model or setting. Colleges and universities thus must increase their emphasis on core content areas within their teacher preparation programs. Ensuring access to the general education curriculum that non-disabled peers study, while attending to the IEP goals and modifications designed for the specific needs of the students, is a necessary blend. When one considers the range of students with disabilities with whom most teachers work, this becomes a significant challenge. Even veteran teachers struggle with addressing the specific and sometimes very different needs of students with disabilities while working within the general education curriculum framework. Thompson *et al* (2006) declares, "all educators are increasingly called upon to find ways to help students with disabilities achieve grade-level content standards," including design of instruction that supports academic content achievement and development of IEP's that support this achievement (p. 142). This means that special education teachers need to be knowledgeable not just of the content area but also of a variety of ways to teach and/or make the content accessible to students with disabilities.

The increased focus on grade-level content standards and access to the general education curriculum is intricately tied to assessment. Teachers need to understand what participation in district and state assessments means for students with disabilities and their teachers. It also means special education teachers need to understand alternative assessments for students with significant disabilities (Thompson *et al*, 2006). The influence of access, standards-based education, and adequate yearly progress speak clearly and importantly to how we must design our teacher education programs in special education. Attention must be paid equally to the content special education teachers will teach and how they will teach the content and facilitate learning, as well as how they will assess, design, or modify assessments. This is a tall order that teacher education programs cannot afford to leave unfilled.

Highly Qualified. In the early days of special education, special education teachers were often required to hold a general education certificate before they could obtain a special education certificate. Later, in many states, special education certificates became stand- alone certificates. NCLB and IDEA 04 do not specifically require dual certification for special educators who teach in specific subject areas, but they require that special education teachers be highly qualified in the content areas they teach as the sole instructor.

This requirement further speaks to the importance of the content area expertise of special education teachers addressed previously. In a very practical sense, it often means that as individuals apply to teacher education programs, content area coursework enters more directly into conversations. Methodology courses in special education that offer a meaningful mix of content area study with pedagogy also are important. Courses team taught by content area specialists and teacher educators with expertise in pedagogy provide special education teacher candidates with opportunities for professional development in both of these areas.

Analysis of the content area expertise of special education teacher candidates may be slightly different if one is looking at undergraduate and graduate programs. At the undergraduate level, it means that teacher education program should be designed so that study in core subject areas accompanies special education coursework. At the graduate level, however, reviewing the candidate's past undergraduate and graduate study for core content area study is essential to advising and determining deficiencies or limitations beyond the teacher education course/program requirements. The importance of content area expertise must be addressed within the context of teacher education and should inform the choices the individual candidate needs to make in entering the teaching field and in future professional development planning.

Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices. IDEA 04 specifically requires that teacher preparation programs in special education ensure that candidates gain the knowledge and skills with respect to practices for students with disabilities that are informed by scientifically based research. In applying this requirement one must consider the context of the certification. In cases where the teacher holds a multicategorical certificate, the challenge is much

greater. These special education teachers need to be knowledgeable and skilled in evidence-based practices for multiple student populations. In some cases, there is overlap between and across disability categories, but there also are disability- specific, evidence-based practices that these teachers should know. Smith (2006) says, "These highly qualified special educators are to be well-versed in the application of new technologies and instructional strategies" (p. 2). This obligation impacts not only what is taught within courses, but also in field experience and clinical practice/student teaching. Knowledge of evidence-based practices alone is not sufficient. As Smith notes, special educators must be able to apply these new techniques and strategies. Therefore, teacher education programs must provide candidates with opportunities to practice this implementation while providing meaningful feedback in a variety of settings across grade levels.

The importance of knowledge of effective teaching practices, thankfully, is not something brand new to the field of special education. In their review, "What is Special About Special Education?" Cook *et al* (2003) argue that the research identifies multiple techniques found to be effective for students with disabilities. They also point out that more attention needs to be paid to the frequency and fidelity with which these effective practices are implemented in special education. Implementation of research-based practices is not just a matter of including such practices in lessons, but also thoughtful decision making regarding use of research-based practices. As expressed by Ellis, Worthington, and Larkin (2004), "The teacher, as a reflective decision maker, literally is the bridge between research and practice" (p. 292). Moreover, knowledge of evidence-based practices is not static; thus follows the need to prepare teachers who are both able and committed to accessing and applying research on an ongoing basis. Teacher educators, as well, must model research informed practice and a commitment to the value of research in our own courses and practice.

Response to Intervention (RtI). An element in IDEA 04, the Response to Intervention approach is a very powerful emerging influence. Linked to the process for determining eligibility under the category of learning disabilities, RtI is an approach for early intervention for students who struggle. RtI has the potential to have a dramatic impact on how both general education teachers and special education teachers function in the classroom with struggling students. RtI essentially is a process for early intervention targeting students who are not making adequate progress. With research-based classroom instruction as the foundation, RtI targets students who do not respond sufficiently to this instruction and provides them with specific research-based interventions at increasing levels of intensity. It includes regular assessment of progress of all students in general education classrooms, usually utilizing curriculum-based measurements and then identification of those students who are not making adequate progress. These students are then provided, in addition to regular classroom instruction, with more specific evidence-based interventions at multiple tiers offering different levels of intensity. Students' progress is assessed more frequently during these intervention periods. Using this data for decision making, students are moved either to a higher or lower tier of intervention. Those students who still do not respond after multiple levels of intervention are then considered for special education evaluation. While academic learning was the original the focus of RtI, it has recently expanded to behavior and consideration of early intervention for behavioral issues.

As states develop their required RtI plans and implement them in the next two years, the role of teachers will take on new dimensions. The specifics of these changes are not yet clear, but the need for special educators to address or emphasize new or different skills already is evident. RtI likely will bring about changes in how we prepare our special education teacher candidates with respect to assessment, intervention, and involvement in the general education classroom. It will bring greater emphasis on curriculum-based measurement and progress monitoring as critical assessment practices above and beyond still necessary diagnostic assessment skills. Intervention using research-based practices in the context of small group instruction echoes an instructional model many special educators have used for a number of years, but the settings and framework for this instruction likely will change. Instead of just occurring in resource/pull out classroom sessions or within self-contained classrooms, special education teachers likely will be

leading these intervention groups within general education classrooms involving students who may not have identified disabilities. Because there is no one specific model for RtI, the implementation of RtI in schools clearly is something to be watched as teacher preparation programs prepare candidates who are ready to work within this early intervention structure.

The Role of the Contestants

In the midst of all of these current and potential changes, it is important to remember that there are some constants in the preparation of special educators. These critical skills should not be lost in the midst of change, for they speak to ongoing responsibilities that special educators face in any of their teaching settings. One constant emphasized earlier is the ongoing need for special education teacher candidates to be cognizant of research in the field, especially evidence-based practices. Special education implies different approaches to instruction for students who have not responded to general education classroom instruction or who need support to access general education classroom instruction. Skills in diagnostic prescriptive teaching, individualization of instruction, management of challenging behavior, preparation of individualized educational plans, development of transition plans, and implementation of specialized methods and materials will remain critical in the preparation of effective special educators. Attention to research with populations of students with disabilities must continue to be a primary focus for teacher education and teachers in practice. Other constants in the preparation of special educators include: expertise in disabilities and legal guidelines, communication with families, and fulfilling advocacy roles.

Expertise in Disabilities and Legal Guidelines

Special educators are recognized in the schools as individuals with expertise in the legal guidelines that shape special education service delivery. Special educators are viewed as sources of reliable and credible information about the disabilities that impact learning, as well as methodologies for addressing the impacts of disabilities and increasing access for successful learning. Special education teacher candidates must both become current in the research on specific disabilities and develop recognition of their ongoing learning curve responsibilities regarding the various disabilities.

Collaboration with Families

Families of students with disabilities are, by law, invited to be involved intimately in the planning of their child's education. Effective communication and collaboration skills are essential for this joint planning to succeed. Beyond collaborative planning skills, special educators must possess awareness and understanding of the possible anxieties, fears, questions, and concerns of parents/families when they learn their child has been diagnosed with a disability.

Advocacy

Special educators often are asked to serve as advocates for their students within the course of a school day or school year. Whether working individually with a teacher to explain or pursue instructional considerations or accommodations, or with administration in development of procedures, adoption of materials, or other tasks, special educators bring the perspective of students with disabilities to these conversations. In turn, special educators need to teach students with disabilities to be advocates for themselves as they advance in their educational journey. Teacher educators must ensure that advocacy remains a critical part of our preparation programs.

Conclusion

Alfred North Whitehead once said, "The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order" (Cook, 2007, p. 296). As teacher educators, if we are to demonstrate positive growth, we must prepare our teacher candidates to succeed amid the constantly changing terrain of special education while remaining committed to the students we serve. Teacher educators in special education need to create within our candidates a willingness to look at change as possible growth, underscored by the ability to preserve order through reflective and informed

decision making practices. It may be the 21st century, but in many ways as teacher educators, we need to realize that our teacher candidates are pioneers who make mandates into reality and further inform future practice in the field. This means we must look at what our candidates do and learn from them so that we can better prepare their successors.

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The Challenge Ahead for Special Education in Illinois, *by Christopher Koch*

Author Bio
Christopher Koch, Ed.D., is Illinois State Superintendent of Education.

Article
Illinois has much to be proud of with regard to our efforts in special education. We rank seventh in the country for exiting students with disabilities with a diploma. We are the flagship state in promoting positive school climates for all students with our Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) initiative. We have passed regulations to better provide interventions for all students when they need them, and we are effectively employing student performance data to prioritize state interventions with local school districts. We are well situated to realize further accomplishments on behalf of students with disabilities.

Specifically, we are placing ourselves in a position to reduce both performance gaps and over-identification. The majority of special education interventions are more effective and lasting if they begin with, work closely with, or are infused with, general education. Most students with disabilities in Illinois are diagnosed with a learning disability at or by grade three — that critical grade by which students must be proficiently reading or they will begin the predictable divergence from their fluently reading peers. That performance gap ever so reliably continues to grow with each passing year. A second volley of students — disproportionally African American – are identified as having an emotional disability by grade eight — a time when boredom, frustration, and embarrassment cause students to express themselves in inappropriate ways.
Performance gaps and over-representation happen because we have not yet mastered the use of data and interventions on behalf of these students, and because many of us still treat categories of disabilities as opposed to treating individual students. We remain challenged also with regard to our preparation programs, where even court-ordered integration of general and special education teacher preparation programs has not adequately penetrated teachers' perceptions of their role in the classroom.

Our challenge is to assist all teachers to become familiar with the tenets of individualized instruction. Every teacher should be adept at providing accommodations and modifications to curricula, in using technology to assess student performance and in recalibrating interventions based on those results. Certainly all elementary teachers should be adequately prepared to teach reading. Further, all special educators need academic content preparation so they are grounded in the disciplines for which they will be providing instruction.

Like most states, Illinois must rely on our strengths to move us toward increased student performance. We can and we must achieve increased student performance. By January 2009, all 872 Illinois school districts will have submitted plans — integrated with district improvement plans — which lay out the foundation for how data-based interventions on behalf of students will occur. There is no better time for us to be engaged in such value-added processes.

When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is reauthorized, growth models will most certainly be a critical issue. Projection models currently allowed under the No Child Left Behind Act to measure growth are not realizing the gains possible for important subgroups of students, including those with disabilities. Status and projection models for growth do not work because they require all students to reach a fixed proficiency target regardless of their initial achievement levels. Yet we know there are a number of low status, high growth schools in Illinois where growth is being carefully monitored against an objective standard. We need to advocate for and implement value-added models of growth (currently not permitted under NCLB), which allow us to measure schools' relative effectiveness by accounting for students' initial achievement levels. When we provide interventions as a result of frequent reviews of student performance data, we greatly reduce costly, delayed, and less effective counter measures to correct

performance. When we use such models as Response-to-Intervention as a basis for making interventions on behalf of students, value-added growth will be much easier to realize and report in the future. Let us not wait for reauthorization of a federal law to make this change. Rather, let us do it because it makes sense for effective teaching and learning to take place.

Illinois has done much to establish a solid foundation for allowing schools to demonstrate and be accountable for student growth, but we must begin demonstrating these gains now, before reauthorization. Working together to implement sound teaching and learning practices for all students will greatly help us in this endeavor.

Response to Intervention, *by Pamela Jessee*

Author Bios
Dr. Pamela Jessee currently serves as the program director for the undergraduate special education program and is an assistant professor at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois. Dr. Jessee has more than 30 years in private and public education. She holds Illinois State Certification in the areas of Elementary Education, Learning Behavior Specialist I, School Psychologist, State Approved Director of Special Education, and General Administration including superintendent endorsement. She has served as a Special Education Coordinator, School Psychologist, and School Administrator in both general and special education.

Abstract
There is so much buzz these days about the "Response to Intervention" (RtI) initiative that is now mandated for implementation by the Illinois State Board of Education by the year 2010. So what is it all about? And more importantly what does it mean for the way teachers will assess, intervene and monitor the progress for all students in all schools in the State of Illinois? This article will provide a brief overview of the RtI initiative, including the history, the definition, the theory, the practice, and the implications for how schools will operate. Before diving into the particulars there is one essential concept that must frame both the perspective of this article and, even more optimistically, how teachers might perceive, understand and eventually act on this premise in their schools and classrooms.

So here goes: No matter what you have heard or seen RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION IS NOT (and I repeat) IS NOT SOLELY A SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE. Although Response to Intervention was born from special education issues related to referral, assessment and placement of students in special education it has now become an important mechanism for monitoring the progress and providing research based intervention for all students whether they are identified as disabled or not. The responsibilities for RtI rest with all school personnel working in collaboration to insure that no child is left behind. The ideal is for general education and special education teachers, administrators, and school service personnel (speech and language therapists, social workers, school psychologists, counselors, etc) and parents to work together to intervene with students who are not meeting the standards in reading and math literacy in order to help them catch up. And when and if it is determined that the interventions are not working and the student is still significantly below his or her peers then and only then does case study commence and diagnosis of a disability ensue. The RtI initiative compels all schools – elementary through secondary, rich and poor, schools that meet "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) and those that do not- to screen all students to determine their level in math and reading and to provide research-based interventions to help students improve. Whew! Now with that out of the way we can begin the journey to understand RtI.

What is Response to Intervention?
According to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, "RtI is the practice of 1) providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and 2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions (NASDE, 2006). In essence this means that schools will have the responsibility to look at every child and answer two questions: 1) Is the child making progress, and 2) how does the child compare with peers in the average ranges of functioning? "Important educational decisions" refers to how school personnel use the data to support the need for intervention and additional progress monitoring, including the need for intensive, individualized instruction and/or special education. In summary, RtI is a problem solving model to monitor the progress of all students on academic and behavioral targets. It is intended to identify struggling students and provide research-based interventions and instruction.

Generally (as adopted in the State of Illinois) a three tier model of school supports is employed, as illustrated below in Chart I. Tier I is the green bottom section of the triangle. In Tier I we provide universal screening and interventions for all students. That is, we use an assessment that measures the academic skills for students in the areas of math, reading and the behavioral skills. Eighty to ninety percent of the students will meet the target. Please note that meeting the target means that students are at, above or very near to grade level. These are students that would represent the average to above average ranges of ability. In addition these are students for whom the classroom practices and instruction have been effective. In the academic arena these are the students who perform at an acceptable level and are making progress with the adopted set of materials and instructional strategies. In the behavior arena these are the students who generally comply with classroom and school rules, exhibit age appropriate interaction with peers and adults, and respond to normal, everyday discipline and consequences programs that are in place in many schools. That is not to say that students in Tier I do not struggle from time to time, but generally these students respond to the traditional preventive and proactive methods and systems that are in place and do not require anything more than that.

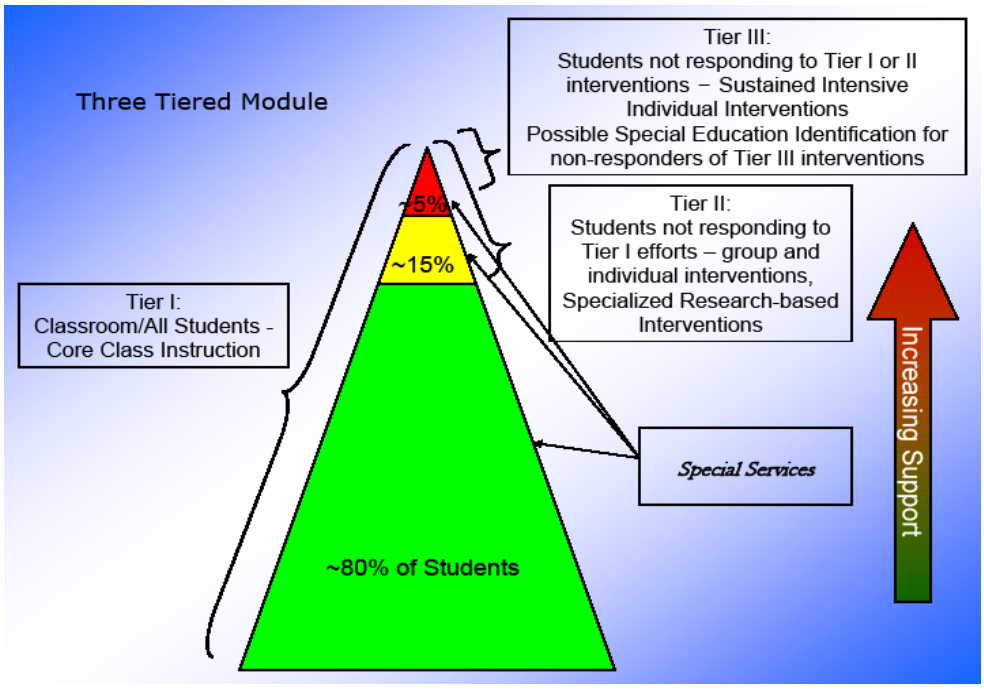


Chart I

Adopted from the work of Jim Wright at http://www.jimwrightonline.com/php/rti/rti_wire.php

But now let's look at Tier II which is the yellow section of the triangle. Tier II interventions are for those students who do not meet the target. Generally this is 15% of the school population. Tier II includes supplemental instruction and intervention that is intended to be targeted and short term in nature. What one looks for with students in Tier II are those youngsters who respond very quickly to the intervention; that is they make progress and move closer to their normally functioning peers.

Tier II is the perfect place for problem solving and collaboration among professional to begin. Many schools have some type of student support team which may operate under different names. Sometimes they are called the "student service team," or "the school-based intervention team," or "the teacher assistance team," among other titles. It is interesting to note that this is not a new concept but has been a standard practice in many schools since the 1970s! Whether in formal practice such as an established committee or through more informal interactions like a

conversation in the teachers' lounge, teachers have often turned to each other for ideas on how to help the struggling students in their classrooms. The difference in an RtI model is that Tier II interventions utilize a standard treatment that has been proven to have a high probability of improving skills. These interventions are generally administered in small groups, are very structured and, most importantly, are provided in addition to core instruction. Intervention progress during Tier II is also assessed and monitored. Student progress under Tier II intervention is monitored and evaluated by the team and decisions are made whether to continue or discontinue Tier II intervention, or refer the student for Tier III intervention.

The red tip of the triangle, Tier III, in Chart I represents 5% of the school population that requires intensive, individual instructional interventions in order to show progress. Tier III services can include district remediation programs, Title I, or special education and again are provided in *addition* to core instruction, *not instead* of, and includes frequent progress monitoring. Tier III interventions are more long term and may at some point result in a multidisciplinary case study to consider the need for special education placement and services. To that end the data that has been gathered through the RtI process is instrumental, as it provides data driven documentation of differences in the level and rate of learning and adverse educational impact, and rules out the exclusionary factor of a lack of high quality instruction and intervention. In addition, the student does not have to wait for intervention to start while the case study is completed because the Tier III interventions the student is receiving continue during the evaluation process.

But let's back up! Tier III interventions do not automatically mean referral for and placement in special education! Again, this is a team decision and students must still meet eligibility criteria for a disability coupled with the presence of adverse educational effects. Consider a student who is an English Language Learner. That student is probably not a candidate for special education despite participation in Tier III interventions, although we know that issues of language acquisition may impact a student's rate and level of learning.

So, an important rule of thumb: Intervention at any level does not automatically transfer into a specific placement or program. Decisions are made by a team on an individual basis.

How Did RtI Evolve?

NASDSE (2006) attributes the earliest reference to an RtI model to the work of Deno & Mirkin (1977) in their data-based program modification model that was applied to academic skills. Deno & Mirkin outlined a standard protocol for reading intervention. Also cited in NASDSE, Bergan (1977) developed a behavior consultation model with a surprisingly similar pattern of activities intended to address and improve the behavioral problems that students exhibited in school. Although working in different disciplines, both sets of authors recommended this model for intervention:

1. Define the problem
2. Measure the performance
3. Determine the current status and gaps as compared to same-age peers
4. Set goals
5. Apply scientifically proven interventions
6. Implement the interventions over a reasonable amount of time
7. Monitor the progress
8. Evaluate results
9. Make educational decisions based on data

Paralleling the work of these researchers two national movements were just getting off the ground. In 1975 the Education of All Handicapped Children Act was enacted into law and the next two decades were spent implementing the major tenets of that law in regard to 1) Least Restrictive Environment, 2) Free Appropriate Public Education, 3)

Procedural Safeguards and Parents' Rights, 4) Referral, Evaluation and Placement of students with special needs, and 5) implementing the Individual Education Plan.

In the early 1980s the conversation about standards based educational reform was emerging with a recommendation for high academic standards and expectations for all students, rigorous tests to measure student achievement related to those standards and a higher degree of accountability for teachers, principals, schools, districts and public education in general. The eventual result of this conversation was legislation in the form of the No Child Left Behind Act and the development of the Illinois State Standards for Learning and the Illinois State Achievement Tests for elementary students (ISATS) and the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) for secondary students.

In the policy arena some significant issues emerged. Among them were issues of discrepancies in the identification of students with disabilities, the research supported ideas of the need for prevention, early intervention and identification of struggling students to occur in the early grades, issues of the "wait to fail" model for intervention, the overrepresentation of poor and minority children identified as disabled, the identification of the major components of reading and reading instruction, and the failure of a dual education system (special education and general education) to meet the needs of all students. Concurrently there was much support for the use of a Response to Intervention model for the identification of students with disabilities and in the 2004 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (now actually written as the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act") schools may employ an RtI model to diagnose students in need of special education and services. Note, however, that the Illinois State Board of Education has mandated that an RtI model be implemented in every district in the State of Illinois by the year 2010.

Suffice it to say that the policy work and the research supported the need for prevention and early intervention. The ongoing work of the National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHD) showed that it takes four times longer to intervene with a 4th grader than it does with a student in late kindergarten or early first grade. Fifteen to 30 minutes a day of intervention with a kindergartener can successfully result in that student being on grade level by the end of the term as compared with the two hours a day that it would take to get the same results with a student in 4th Grade. In terms of special education this is especially troublesome as it often took students until the 3rd or 4th grade to exhibit adequate discrepancy between their intelligence and their achievement which was the traditional model for identifying a Severe Learning Disability. With an RtI approach intervention is provided as soon as the student experiences difficulty instead of waiting until they fail to get the help they need.

In addition to concern over the "wait to fail" approach and inconsistencies in eligibility issues, the Congress looked at the results of the first 25 years of special education. The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education expressed concern over the following issues:

- There was more emphasis on procedural safeguards and getting the IEP right than on the academic achievement of students in special education.
- There were significant inadequacies in the dual special education and general education systems of delivery of services
- The results from the first 25 years revealed that too few students were graduating from high school, many were unemployed, unemployable, underemployed or incarcerated
- There had been a significant lack of highly qualified teachers, little use of research-based interventions, and inadequate options to address the needs of students at the margins.

And the Commission made the following major recommendations:

- **Focus on results—not on process.**

  IDEA must return to its educational mission: serving the needs of every child. While the law must retain the legal and procedural safeguards necessary to guarantee a "free appropriate public education" for children with disabilities, IDEA will only fulfill its intended purpose if it raises its expectations for students and becomes results-oriented—not driven by process, litigation, regulation and confrontation. In short, the system must be judged by the opportunities it provides and the outcomes achieved by each child.

- **Embrace a model of prevention not a model of failure.**

  The current model guiding special education focuses on waiting for a child to fail, not on early intervention to prevent failure. Reforms must move the system toward early identification and swift intervention, using scientifically based instruction and teaching methods. This will require changes in the nation's elementary and secondary schools as well as reforms in teacher preparation, recruitment and support.

- **Consider children with disabilities as general education children first.**

  Special education and general education are treated as separate systems but, in fact, share responsibility for the child with disabilities. In instruction, the systems must work together to provide effective teaching and ensure that those with additional needs benefit from strong teaching and instructional methods that should be offered to a child through general education. Special education should not be treated as a separate cost system, and evaluations of spending must be based on all of the expenditures for the child, including the funds from general education. Funding arrangements should not create an incentive for special education identification or become an option for isolating children with learning and behavior problems. Each special education need must be met using a school's comprehensive resources, not by relegating students to a separately funded program. Flexibility in the use of all educational funds, including those provided through IDEA, is essential.

Taken from http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/reports/summ.html

Concurrently, the National Research Council Panel on Minority Overrepresentation stressed that poor and minority children have a long standing history of being identified as "disabled" and are not likely to attend a school that has adequate resources and qualified personnel to implement research-based interventions in order to remediate academic and behavioral student deficits.

Public opinion and data generated about general education programs were also at an all time low. In 2002 only about 68.2% of students nationwide graduated from high school; Illinois achieving a slightly better percentage at 72.7% (http://www.higheredinfo.org). In a Gallup poll in 2005 only 37% of the respondents expressed confidence in the nation's public education system. When queried, 51% of the respondents indicated that they were somewhat or completely dissatisfied with the nation's schools. On a more positive note, in 2003 both teachers and parents overwhelmingly supported strict standards and guidelines for what students should know and be able to do as a result of their public school experience.

No discussion of RtI would be complete without a look at the federal legislation that has pointed us in the direction of improving educational results in reading and math. Sweeping changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the form of "No Child Left Behind" has reinforced the requirements for using research-based interventions, for

increasing accountability in literacy skills, for increasing linkages with special education, and for increasing prescriptive teaching strategies, especially in prevention and early intervention of reading deficits.

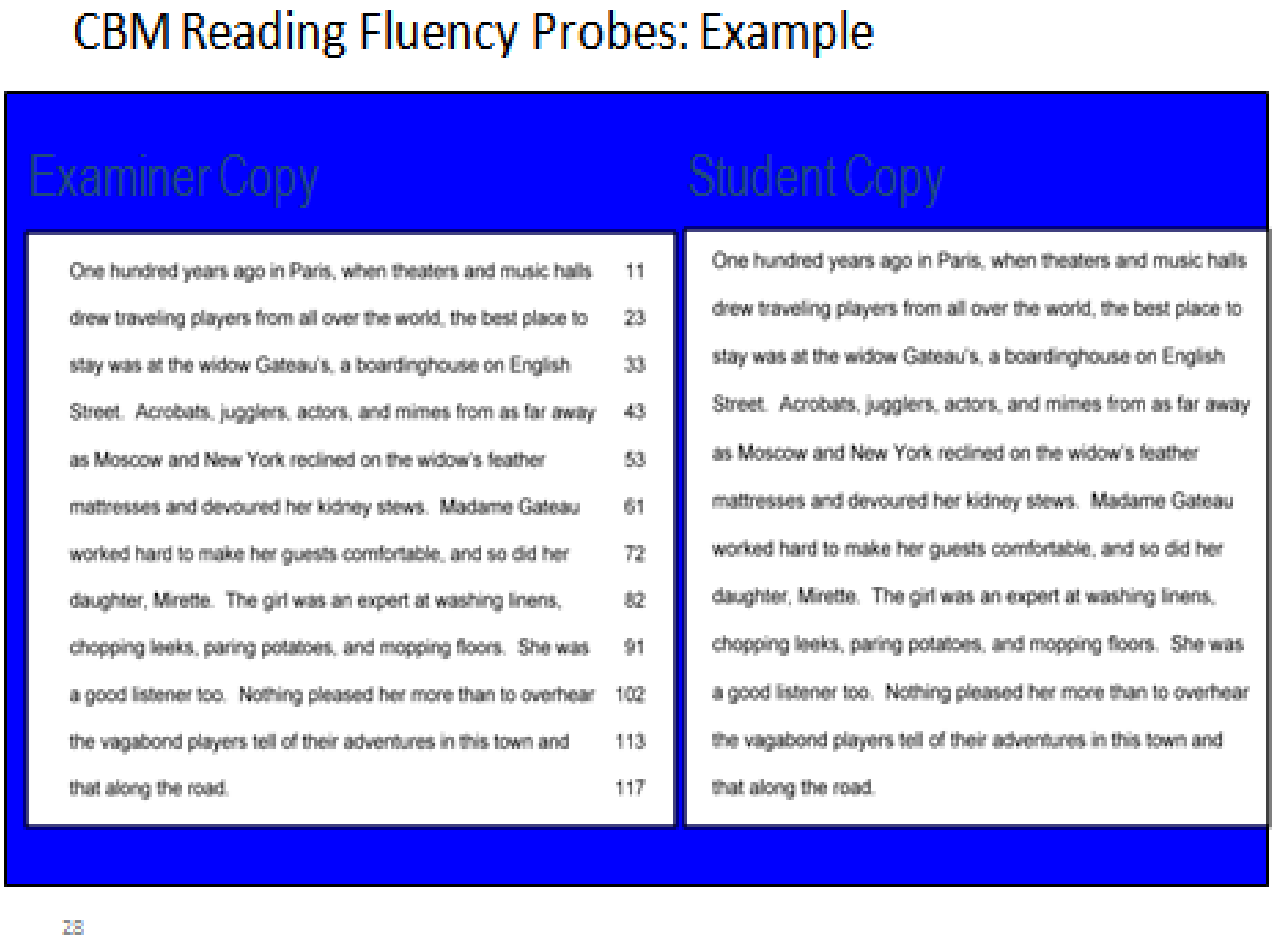
In addition the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act reinforced the requirement for scientifically proven research-based interventions, emphasized the need for pre-referral interventions, mandated that students could be labeled as disabled due to a lack of effective instruction in reading and math and strongly suggested movement toward a Response to Intervention model in the identification and assessment for special education eligibility. In addition IDEIA reinforced the concepts of access to general education curriculum and participation in district and state testing protocols for all children including those with disabilities.

So How Does RtI Work?

Let's start the discussion of how RtI works with what we assess and what type of instrument we use to assess it. At the heart of a Response to Intervention model is the monitoring of student progress. Progress monitoring is a scientifically based practice that is used to assess academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction or intervention. Progress monitoring is done with individual students in the intervention phases of RtI as well as with an entire class for the purposes of Universal Screening in Tier I. Universal Screening is generally administered three times per year in the Fall, Winter and Spring. This type of assessment is known as Curriculum Based Measurement.

Curriculum Based Assessment, known familiarly as CBM, is a method of monitoring educational progress of student academic skills. Most school districts are using a commercially prepared set of assessments for progress monitoring. The two most well-known products are DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and Aimsweb, owned by Pearson Educational Technologies. There are other companies springing up at this moment and some districts have chosen to develop their own sets of assessments.

What these have in common is that they measure academic skills. Aimsweb and DIBELS measure oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, math computation, and writing for students in grades 1 through 8, although the upper extensions for high school students are in the development phases or new on the market. Both companies have materials for early childhood (Pre-Kindergarten through Kindergarten) that focus on the areas of early literacy. CBMs are administered by giving the student brief, timed samples, or "probes," made up of academic material. These CBM probes are given under standardized conditions. And the format of the assessment does not vary from administration to administration. Here are some samples of what the probes look like:



From DIBELS

You will notice that there are two copies of the same passage. The examiner has the copy with the number of words to be read listed down the right hand side of the page and the student copy has only the passage to be read. The student reads orally for one minute and the examiner notes any errors in oral reading fluency. The number of words read correctly is computed and the student's score is compared to children in their grade level. Oral reading fluency must be administered individually.

Here is an example of a Reading Comprehension Task:

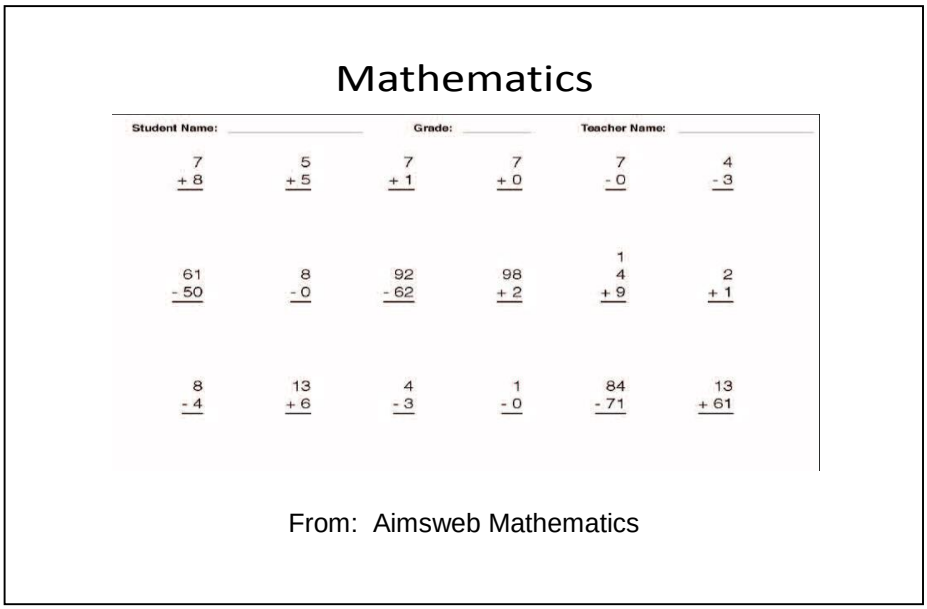
Grade 7 prompt:

Books were everywhere, and Mrs. Tuttle, the person responsible for the books, was getting frantic. Her predicament started in October when **(now, her, she)** found the book supply running low. **(November, on, Mrs.)** Tuttle was a very organized person. **(Her, She, enough)** ordered more books immediately, requesting that **(they, saw, them)** be delivered by air. Air mail **(all, was, were)** always the speediest way to receive **(holes, books, and)**.

From: Aimsweb Reading Maze prompts

The student must choose the word in parentheses that is most appropriate for the sentence and the passage. This is a timed exercise and can be administered to a whole class at one time. Again the number of correct responses is recorded and normative data is available on how students in a particular grade level score and the percentile rank.

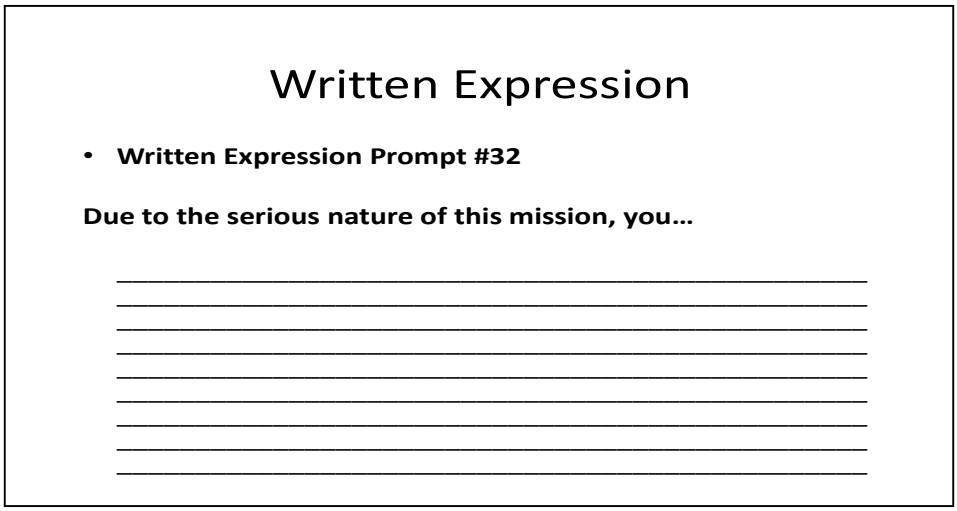
Here is an example of a math probe:



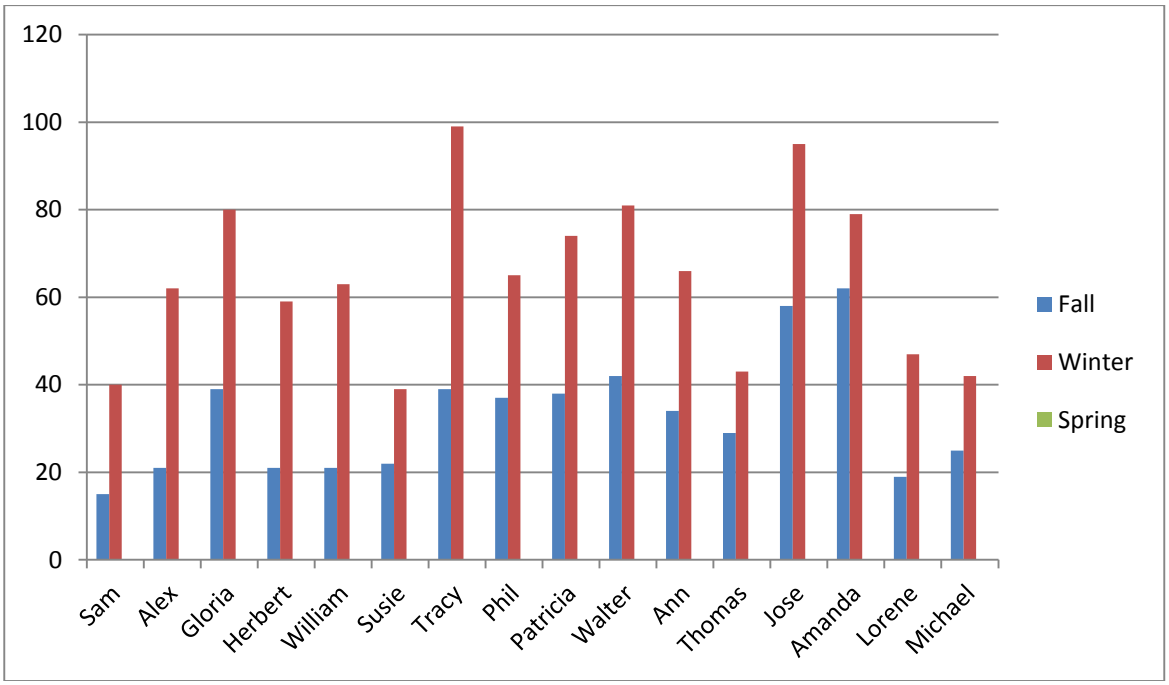
From: Aimsweb Mathematics

Students are given a specified amount of time that varies by grade level to complete as many problems as possible. Teachers can obtain valuable qualitative information that will inform their teaching by analyzing the types of errors that students are making and by noting the types of problems that students complete and the problems they avoid.

In the area of written expression students are asked to write in response to a writing prompt. They are given 4 minutes, the first of which is to be used to organize their thoughts and ideas and the last 3 minutes are to be spent in the actual writing. This assessment can be administered to the whole class at one time. Here is a sample:



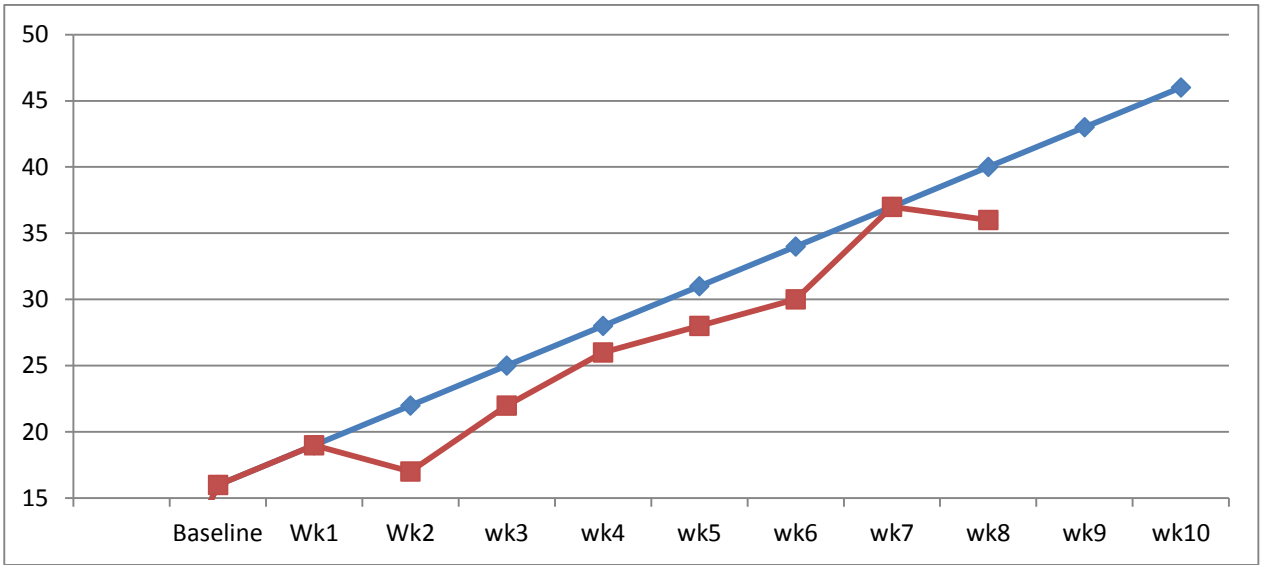
So now that you have an idea of how to assess students using a Curriculum Based Measurement, what do you do with it? For students who meet the target all you need to do is keep the data until the next universal screening date. The graph below is a way to display the data from the screenings so that you and your building principal can see that students in your classroom are improving. As you can see the Spring data has not yet been entered! So, let's say that in the Fall students who scored below 20 were referred for intervention and students who scored below 50 required intervention in the Spring. What might you say about the students in your class? This is a good way to look at academic skill growth for a whole class with a minimal amount of testing and a minimal amount of technology skill!



But what about students who receive Tier II and Tier III intervention? Remember an integral component of the RtI model is to monitor progress on a more regular basis so that one can see if the intervention is working. It makes no sense to wait for 1/3 of the school year to go by before determining whether what the teacher is doing is really working. So, for students who are receiving intervention graph their scores for CBMs on a more regular basis. Let's look at Sam from the grid above. Sam scored 15 on the Fall screening and was referred to receive Tier II intervention. We need to determine the starting point for Sam. We establish a **baseline** because what if that 15 is not an accurate representation of what Sam can do? He may have had a cold that day or there may have been a traumatic family event that prevented Sam from giving his best effort. So Sam is administered three more CBMs before intervention starts. There are two schools of thought in tracking student performance: one is to average the three scores and the other is to take the score in the middle. You will refer to the administration manual of whatever program you are using for guidance on establishing the **baseline.**

Sam scores 14 - 16 – 18 on the first three prompts which gives him a **baseline** score of 16. That will be the first point on his graph. We also want to plot a line that projects how much growth Sam should make over the period of intervention to help him catch up with his peers. (Remember the Winter cut score is 50!) This is called the **Aimline** and it is shown in blue on Sam's graph. Over the 10 weeks of intervention Sam will need to improve by 3.4 in order to get to 50. But to simplify just add 3 each week. Sam starts at 16 and if he improves at a rate of 3.0 over ten weeks he should come very close to his peer group. (16 + 30 = 46)

Here is the graph of Sam's aim line and his scores graphed over the 8 week period. The Blue line is the **aim line** and the Red line shows Sam's actual scores.



You will then use the graph with parents and the intervention team to discuss whether the interventions are working and to make decisions about what to do next. Remember the two essential questions: 1) Is Sam making progress and, 2) How does Sam compare to his peers? It looks like with a little more intervention Sam will probably catch up to his peers!

Implementation of RtI

The implementation of any new system or practice can be a daunting task and is often met with resistance and anxiety from teachers, administrators, boards of education, parents, communities, and legislators. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education has outlined the core principles justifying the use of RtI:

1. RtI is based on the assumption that we can effectively teach all children and that all children can learn.

2: There is strong empirical evidence that early intervention for academic and behavioral difficulties is more effective.

3: RtI's multi-tier model of intervention matches student need and instructional resources to help all students achieve.

4: Research supports the effectiveness of a problem solving model that 1) identifies the problem, 2) analyzes the problem, 3) plans intervention, and 4) monitors progress.

5: RtI's requirement for scientifically proven research-based interventions complies with both NCLB and IDEIA, 2004. And, most importantly, research-based interventions are our best hope to insure quality education for all children.

6: Progress monitoring informs instruction and determines the effectiveness of an intervention in a timely manner.

7: RtI practices are based on data-driven decision making.

8: Assessment is used for the distinct purposes of screening, diagnosis and progress monitoring.

The State of Illinois Plan

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has committed to implementation of a Response to Intervention model in all school districts by the 2010-2011 school year. To that end ISBE has developed the following timeline:
Spring, 2008: Districts have just completed self-assessments and submitted them to ISBE. ISBE recognizes that some districts are further along in the process. Each district will determine their "next steps" and ISBE will provide technical assistance and support.

2008-2009 School Year: ISBE trainers/coaches will conduct RtI training that will address the following topics:

- Three-Tier Problem Solving
- Scientific research-based assessments and interventions
- Leadership and Teaming
- Parent Involvement in RtI

2009-2010 School Year: Training will continue with the addition of the following topics:

- Curriculum Based Measures
- Progress Monitoring Instruments
- Use of RtI in special education eligibility
- English Language Learner Implementation
- Middle and High School Implementation

Training and technical assistance to districts will be provided through ISBE grant funded initiatives that include but are not limited to Illinois ASPIRE (Alliance for School-based Problem-solving and Intervention Resources in Education), ISTAC (Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Center), ROEs (Regional Offices of Education), IRC (Illinois Resource Center) and Special Education Cooperatives. Districts will be responsible for developing an RtI that addresses these issues:

- A process for gathering baseline information on current resources and practices, scientific, research-based instruction, progress monitoring, ongoing assessment and levels of intervention
- Identification of what additional resources will be needed to implement the district plan
- How district stakeholders will be involved in the planning and implementation phases of the RtI plan
- How district stakeholders will be educated on RtI
- What ongoing professional development will be needed for all levels of administrative, instructional and student support personnel

And this is only a partial list. More information can be found on the Illinois State Board website. www.isbe.net .

Implications

There are a few key implications of Response to Intervention for high-need schools, teacher education, and pre-service higher education programs that prepare candidates for the classroom. The leading implication for high-need schools is the essential need for early intervention and progress monitoring for all students. Response to Intervention has the potential to improve significantly the percentages of students who meet and exceed Illinois State Learning Standards in reading and mathematics as school districts are required to provide research-based instruction and intervention. What this has the potential to do is insure that all students are receiving quality education and put a renewed emphasis on "best practice." In addition, the issues of cultural responsiveness and adequate opportunities to learn for all students should become part of the national conversation to insure that we discontinue the practices of over-identification of poor, minority and non-English speaking students in special education.

What does this mean for training the next generation of classroom teachers? Three aspects of teacher training come to mind. First, we must train teachers to appreciate, understand and utilize the research in order to be effective in their classrooms. Second, we must train teachers to work in a collaborative partnership with other educators in order to meet the needs of all students. Special education, ELL and general education teachers along with student support personnel will all expand their expertise in developing instructional strategies that insure academic gains for a diverse population of students. And third, we must train the next generation of teachers on the benefits and practices of assessment and data-driven decision making. These three issues are worthy topics for future journal articles and presentations.

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Summary Findings from the 2007 ACI Special Education Coursework Faculty Survey, *by Anne Deeter*

Author Bio
Anne Deeter is an independent evaluator, who serves as Evaluation Consultant for ACI's *Center for Success in High-Need Schools.*

Introduction
Since 2004, ACI's *Center for Success in High-Need Schools* has fostered collaboration between teacher education and liberal arts faculty throughout the Associated Colleges of Illinois' (ACI) member colleges and universities. Both teacher educators and liberal arts faculty share a mission-driven vision to better recruit, prepare, and retain highly qualified teachers to work in high-need schools. The *Center's Illinois Special Education Collaborative* (I-SPED) has taken this mission one step further -- fostering both the design and implementation of an accelerated special education model and the professional development of special education faculty members throughout the ACI network. Not only has I-SPED transformed curricula to increase the number of colleges and universities approved to prepare multicategorical special education teachers, but it also has engaged special education faculty in critical conversations about the challenging task of keeping current with both changing certification regulations and ever-evolving best practices for teaching special education covering a broad spectrum of disabilities.

To launch these professional development conversations within I-SPED, a web-based survey was designed to gather special education faculty members' perceptions about their professional development needs and program challenges. Respondents were asked to identify: 1) changes made to their programs over recent years; 2) aspects of teaching special education that they find most challenging, and 3) topics for which they perceive the most critical need for professional development.

In March 2007, the online survey invitation was emailed to 17 deans and/or special education faculty at ACI member colleges and universities. Recipients were asked to forward the survey to other faculty members assigned to teach special education coursework at their institutions. A total of 16 useable responses were collected, representing more than 70% participation from ACI member institutions. Almost two-thirds (63%) of the respondents have been teaching this special education coursework for less than three years, an indication, perhaps, of ACI members' development of special education programs to address the statewide shortage of special education teachers. Perhaps not surprisingly at small institutions, the majority of the respondents teach both the introduction to special education coursework, which all teacher candidates take, and the coursework leading to certification in a special education program. Survey findings were summarized and shared with ACI *Center* partners at Spring 2007 I-SPED breakout sessions. Other professional development sessions and conferences based on these survey responses are planned.

Summary Findings
Changes in general education curriculum
For almost half of the programs (46.2%), significant changes have been made in recent years in the general education coursework requirements of all teacher candidates. These changes include adding courses that cover more disabilities and moving from a medical model to a cross-categorical model. In a medical model, special educators are prepared to address specific disabilities and learning needs, grouping children in distinct classroom "categories" that describe their physical or learning disabilities. A multi- or cross-categorical model prepares educators with the skill set to teach in classrooms that include a wide range of disabilities and learning needs.

Almost 90% of those surveyed report a considerable-to-critical need for information about how to modify the general education curriculum to reflect the reality of today's classrooms, in which general education teachers must teach

special education students, but receive only from trained special education teachers. As a result, many respondents also note increased emphasis on more modification, co-teaching, and adaptations of materials in the general education curriculum.

Several faculty members report efforts to obtain better field placements for their students so that candidates can gain special education classroom teaching experience. One respondent observed that it is a significant challenge to find "…quality field experiences that allow candidates to teach, not just observe, and to implement appropriate special education methodology that requires knowledge of student needs that are confidential."

Challenges of limited hours, depth of coverage and keeping pace with change

Almost all (80%) of the faculty respondents describe tremendous challenges in covering both special education issues and competing course content in the limited time available. According to one respondent, the greatest challenge is "…the amount of topics that must be covered sufficiently to prepare beginning teachers in a limited number of credit hours." Others echoed this concern about a lack of depth and breadth of coverage, particularly in attempting to "…answer the 'what do I do if' questions and provide the connections between theory and practice." Keeping current with legislation, litigation, and best practices also ranked high among the stated challenges.

Response to Intervention (RtI) and behavior management rated most critical needs

Table 1 illustrates the respondents' ranking of a wide variety of professional development content areas.

Table 1

For each topic listed below please identify the level of need you feel exists in that topic for TEACHER EDUCATORS:	***Critical Need for Information***	***Considerable Need for Information***	***Some Need for Information***	***Minimal Need for Information***
Behavior management for significantly challenging behaviors	71%	14%	14%	0%
Response to Intervention	67%	20%	13%	0%
Positive Behavior Supports	62%	23%	15%	0%
Collaboration with parents	60%	20%	13%	7%
Collaboration and co-teaching	60%	7%	27%	7%
Learning Strategies	57%	29%	7%	7%
Pre-referral interventions	53%	20%	27%	0%
Research Based Interventions	47%	47%	7%	0%
Social/Emotional needs of students with disabilities	47%	40%	13%	0%
Modification of general education curriculum	47%	40%	13%	0%
Progress Monitoring	47%	33%	20%	0%
General curriculum content for special educators	47%	33%	13%	7%
Writing IEPs	47%	13%	40%	0%
New Law/Regulations	40%	47%	13%	0%
Preparation of candidates for state certification tests	40%	27%	27%	7%
New Diversity Issues (homelessnes poverty etc.)	33%	33%	27%	7%
Autism/Aspergers	27%	60%	13%	0%
Assistive Technology	27%	53%	20%	0%
Impact of Court Decisions	27%	53%	13%	7%
Alternative Assessment Process	27%	47%	20%	7%
Low Incidence Disabilities	27%	33%	33%	7%
Issues of race and gender in special education	21%	29%	43%	7%
Second Language Issues in SPED	20%	47%	20%	13%
Functional Behavioral Assessment	15%	62%	15%	8%
Medication for students with disabilities	14%	36%	43%	7%
Support for the student who is medically fragile	13%	53%	27%	7%
Augmentive Communication	7%	53%	33%	7%
Support for the student with physical challenges	7%	53%	33%	7%

Faculty respondents believe there is a "critical need for information" about behavior management for significantly challenging behaviors (71.4%) and Response to Intervention (66.7%). Positive behavior supports (61.5%), collaboration and co-teaching (60.0%), collaboration with parents (60.0%), learning strategies (57.1%). Pre-referral interventions

(53.3%) ranked highly, with more than half of the respondents rating the topic as a critical need *(Critical need topics are highlighted in yellow in Table 1)*. For all but two of the 27 topics (92%) the combined "critical and considerable need" ranking was higher than 60%, illustrating the depth of topics for which on-going education is perceived to be necessary. Only twelve (40%) of the topics *(highlighted in blue in Table 1)* have less than 30% of respondents rating it a "critical need." When asked to name their top five topics for professional development, Response to Intervention (RtI) ranked number one, followed closely by new diversity issues (homelessness, poverty, etc.), new laws and regulations, and assistive technology. Several respondents note that they "wear many hats within the department" and must feel prepared to teach a variety of courses.

Strong Interest in Collaboration on Professional Development

This survey reveals high interest in collaboration across institutions of higher education. All respondents (100%) report interest in attending local conferences and professional development sessions with other special education teacher educators. Sessions that are one full day in length are preferred by most (71.4%), but 28.6% favor conferences that occur over two full days. ACI special education faculty members also possess a wealth of expertise that can be shared with colleagues. At least one-third of the respondents offered their expertise in either presenting workshops or referring nationally known experts on these topics for professional development activities where there is keen interest and critical need.

Conclusion

On-going and collaborative professional development is essential

As these data reveal, ACI special education teacher educators face tremendous challenges in keeping pace with the changing laws, requirements, and best practices in preparing both general education and special education teachers who can work in challenging multicategorical special education classrooms. Clearly, teacher education coursework must be revised and assessed continually to meet these changing needs. Collaborative professional development appears to be both warranted and welcomed by those on the forefront of this important work. The highest priorities should be sessions on RtI approaches, development of effective clinical experiences, and inclusion of evidence-based practices for special educators. Follow-up studies should assess the degree to which collaborative professional development has affected the ability of special education faculty to review and, ultimately, transform their curricula.

Furthermore, collaborative structures such as ACI's *Center for Success in High-Need Schools* stand ready and able to serve as a forum for teacher educators to gather, collaborate, and develop solutions leading to curriculums that meet these challenges. The *Center's* established infrastructure already has proven to be an excellent means for sharing expertise and ultimately increase the number of Illinois institutions of higher education that are approved to prepare multicategorical special education teachers.

This survey has revealed that shared resources and expertise undoubtedly are cost-effective and productive on small campuses, where special education faculty may be few in number. ACI special education faculty must collectively capitalize on this interest and build momentum to develop ongoing professional development and to collaborate to continually improve their course offerings. Professional development in such a collaborative environment can take the shape of action research projects, formal and informal networking, summer institutes and colloquia, in-service training/workshops, and opportunities for independent study. Within the structure of ACI's *Center for Success in High-Need Schools*, special education teacher educators can continue to leverage their combined expertise to create rigorous and timely professional development opportunities.

Finding My Purpose as a Special Education Teacher, *by Marlo Sails*

Author Bio

Marlo Sails is a special education teacher at James Weldon Johnson Elementary School in Chicago.

Article

Before choosing a teaching career, I worked for several corporate entities including telecommunications, retail, and marketing research companies. After my last employer relocated — and with the end of unemployment assistance staring me in the face — I had to do something. So, I began substitute teaching for the Chicago Public Schools until I was able to get my career back on track. Little did I know, I was already on a new career path.

I was given the chance to teach a kindergarten class for a teacher on maternity leave at James Weldon Johnson Elementary School. Johnson Elementary School is located on the West Side of Chicago in the North Lawndale community. After the teacher returned, I continued to substitute teach across all grades and ages. I enjoyed the energy of the children, their willingness and eagerness to learn, and the rewarding feeling I felt at the end of each day. This feeling inspired me to pursue a career in education. These experiences changed my life. I was able to see my influence on the students on a daily basis and felt as if I had touched their lives as much as they touched mine.

Mattie B. Tyson, the principal at Johnson Elementary School, helped me explore alternative routes to becoming a teacher. The Chicago Public Schools and St. Xavier University had a partnership that included a cohort program for career changers. This program allowed cohort members with college degrees in areas unrelated to education to intern as special education teachers in classrooms by day and attend classes to gain teacher certification by night. The program was accelerated, demanding and illustrative of the best practices for teaching students with disabilities. The advantage of this program was being immediately able to transfer what I learned at night in the university classroom to the students I taught during the day. Not only I was able to use the strategies and activities I learned, but I found ways to improve them on a weekly basis by speaking to my fellow cohort members and my professors.

Working with students who have disabilities and promoting their education in the least restrictive environment enables me to collaborate with my colleagues on best practices for all students. I believe all students can learn and benefit from their peers in both instructional and non-instructional settings. As a case manager, I'm able to facilitate team meetings in accordance with special education law. I educate parents on the rights afforded them and their children with disabilities. For me, becoming a special education teacher helped me to find my purpose. On a daily basis, I feel connected to the students, parents, staff, and the community. I feel as if I am making a difference by molding and shaping the young minds that will shape our future. I'm enjoying every minute of it!

Special Education at McKendree University: Collaborating to Address Teacher Shortages in Illinois High-Need Schools, *by George J. Fero*

Author Bio
George J. Fero, Ed.D. is currently Professor of Education at McKendree University. He served as chair of the Division of Education, Health and Human Performance, leading the division through substantial growth and the achievement of national accreditation during his six year tenure.

Abstract
This article traces the development of a special education program at McKendree University leading to an Illinois LBS1 teaching endorsement and certification. The program grew out of the Illinois Special Education Collaborative (I-SPED), a collaboration funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). FIPSE support enabled Associated Colleges of Illinois member colleges and universities to replicate a model special education program developed at St. Xavier University. On the basis of a needs assessment McKendree conducted in 2003, the university used the St. Xavier model to create its program, which was approved by the Illinois Board of Higher Education, in 2005. During its first three years, the McKendree program has prepared a growing number of highly qualified special education teachers to address teacher shortages in high-need schools.

Background
Founded in 1828, McKendree University is the oldest college in Illinois. The institution has a strong liberal arts heritage that continues to permeate its programs. The preparation of ministers and teachers can be traced back to its founding as a Methodist seminary. McKendree was first authorized to recommend teachers for certification by the Illinois State Board of Education in 1954. Since then, the teacher education programs maintained growth and stability through several areas of certification that serve southwestern and southern Illinois. In 2001, there were approximately 300 undergraduate students at the college seeking initial teaching certification in nine areas including elementary education. Because of state accreditation concerns, the Illinois State Board of Education asked the education division at what was then McKendree College to take an in-depth look at its education programs. This self-assessment and redesign of its programs to meet Illinois and national standards started a renaissance in teacher education at McKendree.

This effort not only resulted in continuing accreditation by the Illinois State Board of Education; the unit also achieved National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation and expanded teacher education to 16 areas of certification, including special education. McKendree College added graduate studies to its curriculum for the first time in nearly a century in 2003, establishing a degree program that offered a Master of Arts beginning in the spring of 2004. By the end of the 2006-2007 academic year, more than 1,200 students were enrolled in initial certification and advanced programs in education. In addition, graduate programs in business, nursing, and professional counseling were added to McKendree offerings. This growth and the change in mission for McKendree College significantly contributed to an institutional restructuring and prompted the name change to McKendree University on July 1, 2007, with the School of Education replacing the Division of Education, Health, and Human Performance.

Special Education – Exploring Collaboration
In 2003, a needs assessment survey was conducted among the 57 collaborating school districts served by McKendree's teacher education program. The assessment identified additional areas of certification that McKendree needed to pursue to be able to serve the region most effectively. The responding superintendents stated that there was an identified need within the region for more than 300 special education teachers over the next five years. That

information led to the decision to begin the process of pursuing an initial certification program in special education for McKendree.

Initially it was determined that McKendree did not have the resources or expertise at the time to develop its own program. Research on the requirements for the program discouraged McKendree from offering special education as an undergraduate option. The school decided to explore post-baccalaureate and graduate level possibilities. At about this time, St. Xavier University received approval from the Illinois State Board of Education to begin offering a Masters degree program leading to initial certification in special education for both practicing teachers and baccalaureate degree holders interested in teaching but lacking a teaching credential. In order to assist McKendree in meeting its mission of serving the Metro-East St. Louis region, particularly the needs of high-need school districts such as the East St. Louis schools, a dialogue with the administration of the School of Education at St. Xavier University – then an Associated Colleges of Illinois member -- began during the 2004 spring semester. St. Xavier was contacted because McKendree had other collaborative projects with the institution, and the graduate program at St. Xavier University leading to initial certification fit closely the mission of McKendree College.

The purpose of this dialogue was to determine whether a collaborative arrangement was feasible that would enable the St. Xavier graduate program leading to the LBS1 certificate to be offered at McKendree, The alternative was an arrangement for McKendree University to offer the courses in the St. Xavier program and for St. Xavier to certify completers of that program. After considerable conversation, the parties agreed that neither of these options would work smoothly due to the need for St. Xavier to petition the Illinois Board of Higher Education for approval to offer a program outside of its region and concerns related to a pending initial accreditation review of the new St. Xavier program.

Concurrently, the Associated Colleges of Illinois, in collaboration with St. Xavier University as the lead institution and McKendree College as the first partner, submitted a successful proposal for a FIPSE grant to develop I-SPED as a means to address the statewide shortage of special education (SPED) teachers in high-need schools. The grant proposal had eight purposes:

1. Reduce Illinois' statewide shortage of highly qualified SPED teachers by increasing rates of certification of highly qualified special education teachers.

2. Increase the capacity of Illinois independent colleges and universities to certify multi-categorical special education teachers and permanently impact the Illinois supply of highly qualified SPED teachers by increasing the number of institutions approved to deliver these certification programs.

3. Help key Illinois school districts to reduce their shortage of highly qualified special education teachers by:

    a. providing a continuous supply of highly qualified new teachers who had successfully passed the state certification exam and completed their field work in those districts.
    b. enabling individuals not fully certified but teaching special education in these districts to complete their certification requirements while continuing their employment.

4. Serve effectively the specific needs of college-educated adults seeking to make a successful transition to teaching through a curriculum designed to prepare them for the realities of the classroom.

5. Develop effective teacher induction and mentoring programs that would support achieving a cumulative teacher retention rate of 85% over the three-year grant period.

6. Recruit college-educated adults likely to consider a transition to teaching in special education.

7. Promote cultural and language diversity among candidates, with minority participation reaching a goal of 28% of graduates certified in special education by the conclusion of the program.

8. Facilitate dissemination and replication of the model throughout the state, beyond Illinois' borders and beyond the lifetime of this proposed grant. (Associated Colleges of Illinois, 2004)

The FIPSE grant was awarded to ACI in October 2004, in the amount of $434,353 and, through I-SPED, a collaborative relationship in special education between St. Xavier University and McKendree College was established.

The I-SPED Collaborative

The primary obstacles that prevented McKendree from establishing its own special education program were a lack of expertise within the faculty and an immediate inability to add the personnel needed to develop and establish the program. Based upon experience and staff advice, it was clear that the Illinois Teacher Certification Board was unlikely to recommend approval of the program to the Illinois State Board of Education unless McKendree College was able to demonstrate that it possessed the expertise to develop and deliver the program. In providing support for I-SPED, ACI's FIPSE grant enabled McKendree to collaborate with St. Xavier University to address these obstacles and to develop a McKendree proposal to bring to the certification board in a relatively short period of time. The School of Education at St. Xavier University first gave permission to McKendree to fully replicate the course of study that allowed McKendree to adopt all the St. Xavier course titles, descriptions, and syllabi. The ACI FIPSE grant provided a stipend for the chair of Special Education at St. Xavier to serve as a consultant to McKendree for the three-year grant period. In the first year, the St. Xavier chair helped with preparation of the McKendree program proposal and assisted with its presentation before the certification board. During the second and third years of the grant, the chair served as a consultant as needed.

McKendree College adopted the St. Xavier University Special Education program in its entirety. To do so, the college employed a course numbering sequence that closely matched the St. Xavier numbering system. To demonstrate to the Illinois Teacher Certification Board that this program was a replication, it was necessary to cross-reference the conceptual frameworks for both institutions as well as the missions for both teacher education units and the two institutions as a whole. The program proposal application was developed between January and September, 2005 through a process that included obtaining the internal approvals needed at McKendree to deliver the graduate program.

The completed proposal was presented to the Illinois Teacher Certification Board in October 2005. The chair of the Special Education program at St. Xavier University was present for the certification board meeting to address questions and concerns raised by board members regarding the content of the program, its relationship to state and national standards, and the likelihood that McKendree could ensure that qualified faculty would be available to offer the proposed courses. The certification board subsequently recommended approval of the proposal to the Illinois State Board of Education, which then approved the program in November 2005, thus enabling McKendree to entitle completers for certification.

Program Implementation

Between program approval and the beginning of the spring 2006 semester, McKendree recruited its first cohort of special education candidates and hired course instructors to teach the first two courses. The McKendree Graduate

Admission Office was poised to initiate an immediate recruiting campaign upon state board approval. Essentially, the program of studies was based on the completion of two to four courses in special education, elementary education, or reading each semester for six semesters. Entitlement for certification would occur after five semesters and the Master of Arts in Education degree with an emphasis in special education would follow upon the completion of six additional semester hours of elective coursework. Due to the short public notice to recruit a first class, the initial cohort started the 2006 spring semester with three candidates. During the 2006 summer session, the program attracted additional students and has continued to grow to its current enrollment of approximately 50 candidates.

Funding from ACI's FIPSE grant also enabled McKendree to purchase needed materials and supplies to support the new program start-up. Based on recommendations of the part-time instructors employed to staff the program's initial courses, complete sets of diagnostic tests, materials, and adaptive equipment were purchased to support the program. Recruitment of a full-time tenure-track faculty member, required as a condition of McKendree's certification board program approval, was initiated at the beginning of the 2006 spring semester. The institution was able to hire a well-qualified special education teacher and supervisor in an area school district as a non-tenure track full-time faculty member for fall 2006. A second faculty position was filled with a tenure-track faculty member beginning in the fall of 2007.

As time passed, the dedicated faculty involved with the program increasingly came to model in their professional behavior the three core attributes of the McKendree conceptual framework: "Caring Practitioner, Knowledgeable Professional, and Lifelong Learner." As caring practitioners, faculty in the Special Education Department became the lifeline connecting the university and the candidates. Through this connection, the commuter graduate candidates remained grounded in the content and ideals of the program. Advising became a time for personalized guidance for the completion of core, general, and elective courses. Additional meetings were arranged at off-campus sites to accommodate candidates' schedules. Candidates were provided with access to their advisors during after-business hours. Office hours were made available during morning and/or evening hours to further accommodate candidates' employment, sitter concerns, or transportation issues. Advising appointments became times for reflection, counseling, "father/mother confessor" sessions, or just a cathartic moment. These sessions proved to be invaluable to both the department and the candidates. The sessions provided insight into needs of the candidates, as well as a refuge for the weary, transient, commuter graduate candidate. Some candidates have declared that these connections made during advising sessions made the difference between their dropping out or completing the program.

The faculty of the McKendree Special Education program, as "knowledgeable professionals," drew from their personal experiences (i.e. classroom teacher, behavior interventionist, occupational therapy assistant, suicide prevention counselor, professional developer, parent, resource teacher, community volunteer). The mature candidates related well to these experienced educators "from the trenches." The knowledgeable professionals were able to analyze text materials and synthesize them into scenarios for reflection. They also relate to current trends and provide relevant details from the field. The majority of these faculty members were employed in surrounding school districts and were able to relate pertinent data from the field to information in program texts, course evaluations, selection of text books, and the adaptation of the components of the special education initiatives on the campus to actual conditions in the schools. Evaluations and suggestions for program improvement were solicited from mentoring teachers and partnering school districts to re-tool the program where necessary. The McKendree Special Education program remains a place of reflective study, and efforts at continuous program improvement continue to this day.

As the program evolved, feedback from faculty and candidates alike led to several changes that were implemented with the fall 2008 semester. The original St. Xavier University model was based upon that university's relationship with school districts in the Chicago area. Because most of the St. Xavier candidates were placed as aides in Chicago schools, having field experiences imbedded in courses was a natural procedure. However, because many of the candidates in

the McKendree program were practicing full-time teachers in school districts throughout the area, the logistics of having numerous field components was found to be cumbersome and inefficient. In addition, many students transferring from other programs into the McKendree program did not have the field experience that was imbedded in the foundations course for special education that was often accepted in transfer. Thus, a vehicle was needed to ensure that all candidates fulfilled all field experience requirements. Consequently, the field experiences were removed from all content courses in the McKendree curriculum and were concentrated in three intensive non-credit field experience practicum's requiring concurrent enrollment in selected content courses. This approach made possible consistent field experience supervision and provided a vehicle for candidates transferring courses from other institutions to meet McKendree's field experience requirements.

A second area of concern raised by faculty, practitioners, and candidates was the need to provide a stronger background in education law. To resolve this concern, one of the two elective courses for the Master's degree was changed to a required course in school law for initial certification or endorsement. The third area of concern raised was the need for special education teachers to be better consumers of research. To resolve this issue, the second elective course for the Master's degree was changed to a required course in action research planning. This course is taken concurrently with the Education Research and Statistics course. In addition to resolving the concern, this change also brought the Master's in Special Education research block of courses into alignment with curricula in other McKendree MAEd programs.

Collaborative Accomplishments

The collaboration between St. Xavier University and McKendree University addressed all of the initial goals of ACI's FIPSE grant proposal:

1. The successful introduction of a special education program at McKendree University has reduced the shortage of highly qualified SPED teachers in the Metro-East area of Illinois, including the East St. Louis Schools, by increasing the rate of certification of highly qualified special education teachers.

2. This program has permanently increased the capacity of McKendree University to certify multicategorical special education teachers and permanently impacted the Illinois' supply of highly qualified SPED teachers by increasing the number of institutions approved to offer certification programs.

3. The program at McKendree University helped high-need Illinois school districts, such as East St. Louis and Cahokia, to reduce their shortage of highly qualified special education teachers both by providing a continuing supply of highly qualified new teachers who have successfully passed the state certification exam and completed their field work in those districts, and by enabling individuals who were not fully certified to complete their certification while continuing their employment.

4. A number of candidates in the McKendree program are career changers who have not had any teaching experience nor been certified as teachers. Thus, the program is effectively serving the needs of college-educated adults seeking to make a successful transition to teaching through a curriculum designed to prepare them for the realities of the classroom.

5. McKendree has in place an effective teacher induction and mentoring program that supports high rates of teacher retention.

6. College-educated adults likely to consider a career transition to teaching special education have been recruited to this program.

7. The cultural and language diversity among candidates at McKendree University has increased significantly since the inception of this program.

8. The model has been disseminated and replicated. At least one other ACI member college has modeled its program proposal on the McKendree program in seeking Illinois State Board of Education approval. Moreover, the McKendree program has been disseminated in presentations at state, regional, and national conferences.

Plans have also been made to take the delivery of this program to a new level within the region served by McKendree University by offering special education courses at sites already in place for other McKendree University graduate programs. This will allow a program that grew from the I-SPED collaborative not only to have an impact on high-need schools in the Metro-East area of St. Louis, but also in the rural high-need school districts of southern Illinois.

Teaching Collaboration, Believing in the Transformative Power of Learning: Special Education Preservice Training at Aurora University, *by Kathleen Bradley*

Abstract
Like many universities, Aurora University has moved to help ease the national shortage in special education teachers my establishing a special education certification program. In doing so, research and model programs have been sought which support Aurora's mission of collaboration and transformative learning, and that have dealt with the breadth of knowledge necessary in a cross-categorical certification program and addressed the change to increased collaboration in the special educator's role. Rather than require a double certification in regular and special education, Aurora's program is designed to provide some overlap in course work but still allow each to have areas of relative expertise. In taking this route, Aurora recognizes that it is critical to teach collaboration actively. After a pilot where regular and special education courses were taught during the same time slot, allowing collaborative interactions between professors and candidates, this model will be extended, maintaining a social constructivist theoretical base. As many special and regular education courses as possible will be taught in the same time slots, thereby allowing collaboration and co-teaching both at the collegiate and pre-service levels. While the same logistical issues faced by other universities, such as teaching load, will present challenges, Aurora remains committed to continuing to teach collaboration consciously, expanding the amount of actual pre-service co-teaching experience before student teaching. Finally, Aurora also is dedicated to conducting research in an attempt to ascertain if this model not only makes candidates more comfortable with the idea of co-teaching and collaboration, but also actually leads to increased co-teaching and collaboration in the schools.

Introduction
In an effort to alleviate a national shortage, the Associated Colleges of Illinois (ACI) has established the Illinois Special Education Collaborative (I-SPED), with objectives not only of increasing the number of special education graduates and improving teacher retention by providing innovative and collaborative teacher education programs, but also of doing so in a manner that will increase quality services for students in special education at high-need schools. The pilot of ACI's cohort model was instituted at St. Xavier University in Chicago, which boasted extensive partnerships with the Chicago Public Schools that enabled candidates to accrue as much as two years of field experience before completion of the program (Baker, 2005). In the past two years, ACI has expanded its I-SPED program to other ACI member institutions, who were encouraged to use the basic cohort model and support from ACI staff and participating members to create variants of the model for pre-service special education programs.

At Aurora University, with a College of Education mission statement of "Excellence through Collaborative Communities of Learners" backed by a University mission of "An Inclusive Community Dedicated to the Transformative Power of Learning," the idea of establishing a special education program based on collaborative relationships was a perfect philosophical fit. With Aurora's own philosophy, the cohort model of ACI, and a survey of special education program research as a foundation, Aurora University has established a special education program that is a variation on the ACI theme—using collaborative models as an infrastructure, the University has begun to reorganize both special education and regular education coursework to benefit from insights arising both from our own regular education programs and from other institutions and researchers, as well. In this process, four themes around which Aurora has made decisions that have shaped its programs have become apparent, each of which has presented a particular challenge: 1) the need to generate special educators to fill a shortage vs. the need to provide pre-service training for a cross-categorical certificate, 2) the need to teach a "bag of tricks" vs. the need to provide a philosophical and theoretical organization that will provide structure in novel situations; 3) the reluctance of all established organizations to undergo change vs. the need to change creatively university infrastructures to respond to changing educational needs; and 4) the propensity to "go with the flow" vs. the need to research and reflect on our own practices as university educators.

The Challenge to Deliver Breadth of Knowledge and Experience Sufficient to Sustain Teacher Candidates in Their Initial Teaching Years: Quality Over Expediency

The shortage of special educators is clear: there are simply not enough graduates to fill open positions. The *Special Education Workforce Watch: Insights from Research* (2005) showed an increased need of 135,000 special education jobs over the years from 1998 to 2008, with some states relating that more than 20% of special education jobs were filled with teachers lacking certification. Moreover, in its *2005 Executive Summary*, The American Association for Employment in Education found that six of seven teaching fields deemed to be experiencing a "considerable shortage" were in special education (2005). These statistics are echoed in those collected by the State of Illinois. In the December 2005 edition of *Educator Supply and Demand in Illinois*, special education was the only area to show ratios of new teachers certified to new teachers hired that was less than one (0.7)—i.e., the only category to report a shortage. While the shortage of new special education personnel implies that pre-service education programs need to expend more resources for special education programming, the shortage is also in part due to professionals leaving the field. Special educators tend to leave the field not because they feel frustrated and exhausted by their students, but because they feel frustrated and exhausted by bureaucratic paperwork and a lack of support from their administrators and colleagues (Billingsley, 2004; Fore *et al*, 2002).

Given these forces, special education pre-service programs will tend to be pressured to place an emphasis on producing more graduates as quickly as possible. With the State of Illinois' move to cross-categorical certification, the predicament of needing to produce more special educators who need extensive training in a variety of disability types and severity levels is only intensified.

What Aurora University has Taken Away from this Challenge

Despite the pressures to produce graduates quickly to fill vacancies, Aurora University has chosen to institute a special education program that is more intensive than that required for regular education. The undergraduate major involves two full years of course work in both special education and regular education methods, such that candidates leave Aurora having learned the perspective of the regular education teacher as well as that of the special educator. Similarly, the hours needed for the Master's in Special Education exceed those required for a Master's in Education. While it is tempting to cater to market demands, under-preparing the candidates and failing to include sufficient coping strategies for job realities that have driven teachers from the field will result in fewer special education teachers rather than more.

Challenge to Establish a Philosophical Orientation that Both Fosters Collaboration Between Regular and Special Education and Provides Coherence for the Candidates

A trend to which pre-service programs in special education must attend is the changing role of special educators over the last fifteen to twenty years from one of resource room pull-out to push-in, collaborative co-teaching, and consultation (Klingner & Vaughn, 2002). With the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) supporting the increase in inclusive practices, many new special education teachers will find themselves collaborating with regular education teachers in an inclusion classroom, sometimes as consultant but often in some form of co-teaching (Walther-Thomas, 1997; Hoppey et al., 2004). Universities must plan how to prepare candidates for these collaborative and inclusive practices. On a basic level, will they merely teach these practices or will they model co-teaching and collaboration by changing the university program structure and/or by providing direct field experience before student teaching?

In their attempts to develop strategies to adapt pre-service training to this trend, colleges of education are often faced with an even more basic dilemma. Almost from its inception as a field, special education has tended to have pre-service training programs that remained separate and distinct from regular education (Villa et al., 1996; Voltz, 2003). This separation is in part due to a perceived difference in philosophy and theoretical orientation toward teaching:

regular education often conceptualized broad distinctions between teacher-centered or student-centered programs or approaches, whereas special education, by definition focused on the individual student, has tended to be viewed as centered more on direct instruction of specific skills and strategies rather than on developing thinking skills more broadly. From the beginning, then, a perceived rift emerged in orientation and philosophy.

Indeed, some researchers would say that this debate is still taking place today. Some special education schools have chosen to focus on establishing a list of core "research based" practices which they wish to have their candidates or teachers master (Marks & Gersten, 1998), while other practitioners have written journal articles with a clear goal of offering a compendium of practices that have proven to be effective (for example, see King-Sears, 1997). Still other researchers caution that candidates and teachers may learn mastery but not how to use the methods productively in novel teaching situations (Pugach, 2005). That is, an atheoretical amalgamation of skills gives no hypothetical overview of how to approach teaching the individual child and tailoring education to his or her needs—rather the teacher can fall into a routine of merely running a program. Since some researchers have found that compatibility in philosophy between co-teachers may be one of the most critical elements for success (Kamens, 2007), it may significantly help pre-service candidates to have a conscious theoretical perspective from which to approach colleagues, assisting to clarify communication and match co-teachers (Hoppey et al., 2004). Moreover, this need has also been identified by K-12 teachers; a shared vision of a collaborative model may be enough to sustain the practice of collaboration and co-teaching in high-need schools, even when financial resources are withdrawn (Fisher *et al*, 2000).

Other researchers have noted that both special education and regular education pre-service programs have embraced the idea of inclusion and collaboration at the university level in varying ways. For example, Villa and his colleagues (1996) described programs such as those at Trinity College, where both regular and special education candidates take the same first year core courses, with specialized field placements occurring in the second year and dual certification an option, while Syracuse University requires dual certification of all teacher candidates. Still another program, Arizona State University-West, supported special education and regular education professors co-teaching and taught methods classes at local elementary schools where students were placed in internships (Villa et al., 1996). To some degree, however, these programs stand apart from other regular education and special education programs: this type of collaborative practice at the university level exists due to a conscious effort and a philosophical belief that it should be so.

Yet other special education programs, such as the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, have sought to set themselves apart from a more behaviorist school by clearly identifying themselves as constructivists, with a focus on social justice. As is true where K-12 regular education and special education collaboration occurs, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee professors feel strongly that the two divisions at the university level must have a consonant philosophical perspective or collaboration will not be effective. While, as with all programs, it is a work in progress, the clarification of program goals helps give clarity of purpose and direction for tasks such as hiring new faculty who can support the endeavor. Moreover, unlike Syracuse, a decision was actively made not to pursue dual certification for all students. Rather, while seeing the need to develop an appreciation for their colleagues and understand the benefits of universal design in the classroom, each group—special educators and regular educators—would be trained to bring special expertise to the classroom; it would be in the collaborative application of these knowledge bases that students could best be served (Ford et al., 2001; Gerber & Popp, 2000).

In fact, while university pre-service training programs may have acknowledged the need for coursework to teach "best practices" that would include a collaborative model, it is relatively uncommon that teacher education programs model any sort of inclusive or collaborative practice at the university level—that is, university professors in regular education and special education tend not to co-teach or collaborate between their domains and their courses; the two programs

remain distinct, with members of each faculty seldom teaching the other's perspective. In fact, in a survey of pre-service programs, Voltz (2003) found that only 18% of respondents used any "infused" collaborative efforts where the special education issues permeated multiple courses in the pre-service program. Only 7% said they had completely "infused" special education across their curriculum.

If universities do elect to model collaborative practices, they also tend to include collaborative field experiences in pre-service training before student teaching (Villa et al., 1996; Ford et al., 2001). For candidates whose first collaborative experience occurred during student teaching, it may be a function of too little too late to impact the candidates' attitudes about special education (Tomlinson in Pugach, 2005). Yet other novice collaborators tended to relate that they enjoyed the level of support garnered from a co-teacher—although mentor supervising teachers sometimes worried that the candidates never had the experience of "doing it on their own." Despite generally positive experiences with co-teaching, candidates reported that starting collaborative practices earlier, enabling them to experience multiple partners, would have significantly enhanced pre-service preparation (Kamens, 2007; Hoppey, 2004; Kaufman & Brooks, 1996; Pugach, 2005).

What Aurora University Gained from the Research Literature

Many models, similar to those described in this article, were reviewed before the basic Aurora University program design was set. In the end the University elected to pursue a modified "infusion" model. Special education and regular education remain separate tracks, where candidates can acquire specialized knowledge that they will bring to the collaborative effort. However, the Aurora model is structured to enable significant interaction between these two groups throughout their coursework. Additionally, special education undergraduate candidates are required to take three regular education methods courses, augmenting their ability to assume the regular education perspective and making them more effective when collaboration is needed.

Like many programs, the idea of collaboration is not merely infused within more general coursework, but there are also specific courses dedicated to investigating the relationships between diversity and disability, collaboration, differentiated instruction in the inclusive classroom, and transition—all critical for working with the diverse population in the Aurora community. While regular and special education remain different tracks, candidates are encouraged to explore the idea of dual certification, as well as taking courses from the ESL/Bilingual track, as Aurora offers the coursework necessary for Bilingual Special Education.

Like the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the philosophical stance of the College of Education of Aurora University is largely constructivist, supporting social justice—again, seen as a critical component due to Aurora's number of high-need partner schools—and has a mission statement regarding the need to establish collaborative communities. Therefore, the fact that the special education program adopts a social constructivist perspective will facilitate our moving toward modeling of collaborative efforts between regular and special education at the university level. We feel that this philosophical and theoretical stance takes us subtly beyond the view that all students can learn to that all student can think. Like Pugach (2005), we feel that a theoretical framework helps candidates frame pedagogy; but we would add to that notion that a social constructivist approach is the most likely to allow a candidate to establish a dialog with a colleague who has a different philosophical orientation and still achieve a productive working relationship that will benefit students.

Like the other teacher education programs at Aurora, the undergraduate special education program teaches multiple perspectives, but under a social constructivist framework. Just as an authoritative teacher or parent provides considerable structure in conjunction with a willingness to share control, social constructivism allows a great deal of teacher structure while establishing a shared understanding —indeed, scaffolding instruction requires both flexibility and structure on the part of the teacher. It is not a matter of refusing to accept approaches such as direct instruction,

but one of an educator actively selecting when various approaches will be productive and still allowing for active learning on the part of the student. In short, Aurora University sees social constructivism as consonant with an eclectic approach that is in the true spirit of an individualized education plan.

Also fortuitous, the College of Education's existing regular education program has been designed to imbed clinical field experiences from the very first education class. Like Arizona State University-West, Aurora teaches its methods classes in partnering public schools. Like St. Xavier in Chicago, all of Aurora's teacher candidates exit with significant clinical experiences in schools, representing a range of socio-economic levels, languages, and urban/suburban settings, by the time they student teach. Special education methods classes, like those for regular education, will also be taught in the schools. While the special education program at Aurora is new, a model for co-teaching and field experiences has been piloted. Co-teaching will continue to be developed as a blended approach. Professors in regular and special education will come together to co-teach parts of courses, sharing their relevant expertise with the classes; candidates in special education and regular education will engage in joint projects between mirrored classes (regarding scheduled time and content of instruction), requiring collaboration of candidates from their very first education course.

In this way, candidates will have two or more years of experience collaborating with peers, their professors, and participating teachers in the schools before student teaching, allowing them to experience collaboration with numerous colleagues and students. Such an approach will also have a beneficial impact on regular education students. Despite the effort to expose both regular and special education candidates to collaborative experiences, the special education candidates' field experiences will not be limited to collaborative efforts that prescribe inclusion. Rather, the candidates will engage in a broad range of field experiences, from those in self-contained classrooms in separate schools to students who are fully included.

Challenge to Overcome the Same Logistical Considerations at the University Level that Often Inhibit Collaboration in the K-12 (3-21) Grades

Interestingly, concerns voiced in the K-12 school systems are much the same as those that have proved problematic in changing pre-service teacher education programs to collaborative ones at the university level. Teachers in the public schools have been asked to collaborate and co-teach with minimal or no training (Welch et al., 1999); as a parallel, pre-service programs have also done little to prepare future teachers for collaborative and inclusive behavior in a structured fashion, particularly in regular education. The latter may only include a single course on exceptional children. This is true to a lesser degree in special education where there is often additional coursework dedicated to inclusion and collaboration (Voltz, 2003; Hudson & Glomb, 1997). Special education teachers value these courses in their pre-service programs (Austin, 2001) and generally feel more prepared for collaborative activities than do regular education teachers (Fennick & Liddy, 2001).

In addition to citing the need for professors to be philosophically compatible as a problem, universities have claimed that establishing successful collaborative efforts and co-teaching at the college level creates problems in teaching loads, increases costs because more full time professors are required, causes havoc with student schedules, and is too time intensive due to the required planning time to be cost-effective—all weaknesses also noted by K-12 teachers (Voltz, 2003). Colleges have tried co-teaching, block scheduling, back-to-back scheduling, partial semester hour credit for professors, and trading courses with varying degrees of success (Voltz, 2003). K-12 personnel have consistently voiced similar logistical problems, e.g., a lack of staff development and planning time, student scheduling issues, caseload concerns, and insufficient administrative support (Pugach & Wesson, 1995; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Gerber & Popp, 2000; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Prolman, 2001).

What Aurora University has learned from these challenges

Just as it is critical in K-12 settings, Aurora is fortunate to have an administration that is flexible in regard to establishing professorial work loads. Precedents already exist for sharing courses, opening up possibilities for courses designed to play to the expertise of different professors. Aurora has scheduled similar domain classes for regular and special education at the same times. For example, introductory regular and special education courses are taught at the same time, allowing joint projects in the schools; reading courses in regular education are taught at the same time as reading disorders; science methods are taught at the same time as a special education course for the sciences and mathematics. In all of these instances, students will maintain their separate enrollment in either their regular education or special education class, but the classes will come together for shared content and collaborative projects.

Additionally, special education courses tend to be taught back-to-back, allowing for some flexibility to move content between classes. However, this cannot be guaranteed to be of great benefit, as some courses have different groups of candidates—that is, there is not a perfect cross-over of registered students. The ideal scenario would be to establish a true block schedule of both regular and special education coursework. Like many universities, Aurora has not yet succeeded in accomplishing this goal. As others have noted, issues ranging from the need for extensive general education coursework to candidates transferring into programs at varying points make this goal problematic. Still, the willingness of staff to think creatively will continue to shape the Aurora program such that the infrastructure of the University provides a continuum of educational models, dependent on the need of our candidates. Additionally, the College of Education plans to extend the collaborative interchange of teaching skills and strengths to other colleges within the University, seeing potential internal partnerships that can be explored not only with Arts and Sciences but also Business, Nursing, and Social Work. It remains, and should remain, a work in progress.

Challenge to Reflect on and Research Our Own Program Practices: To NCATE and Beyond, or Let's See if We're Actually Designing Programs that Work

In the early years of inclusion and co-teaching, the emphasis was more on changing the attitudes of teachers to accept that students with disabilities could be integrated into the regular classroom, to accept that all children could learn. In more recent years, surveys of literature would imply that this attitudinal shift appears to have taken place for both regular and special education teachers (Pugach, 2005; Welch et al., 1999) and students (Klinger, 1999)—although some veteran teachers have found it interesting that first they were told they could teach children with special needs, then that they lacked the expertise, and now, once again, that regular education teachers are thought capable of inclusion—all without further training (Prolman, 2001).

Accompanying this attitudinal shift, numerous papers cited inclusive practices that were deemed to be effective, often based on "best practice" research that focused on isolated techniques, on surveys, or reviews of model programs (e.g., Villa et al., 2005). Reviews of the research literature suggest, however, a relative dearth of actual studies of the efficacy of co-teaching and inclusive practices in schools in relation to student outcomes (Pugach, 2005; Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999.) In contrast to the early fears that inclusion would negatively impact the learning of regular education students, literature reviews have found that regular education students generally fair well in the inclusive setting but that the learning outcomes for special education students have been mixed (Salend & Duhaney, 1999). Other studies have also questioned the impact of inclusion on special education students, stating that for some students having the option for some pull-out instruction may provide the best opportunity for learning (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Zigmond & Baker, 1996), particularly in relation to high school outcomes (Boudah, Schumacher, & Deschler, 1997; Mastropieri & Scuggs, 2001). Despite these notes of caution, many studies have also reported benefits of inclusion to all students, particularly socially, as well as to teachers themselves (Walther-Thomas, 1997; Turner, 2003).

What Aurora University has taken away from this challenge

Whether we, as university communities, would select it, the change to inclusive practices is here; the challenge now becomes to design inclusive and co-teaching models that are effective, both in regard to theoretical and philosophical principles that offer coherence to programs and to practical solutions to logistical obstacles to implementation. In addition, university communities must assume the responsibility to research these programs, taking us far beyond anything that an accrediting body such as NCATE would require. Granted, this research by nature will tend to be "messy" and almost certainly will be quasi-experimental at best. While a true control is not possible, Aurora plans to run two different tracks within its regular education program, offering the original model to those candidates who choose it and the collaborative model with the special education track to another group of candidates. Of course, given that there will not be a random assignment of candidates, we run the risk that candidates will self-select a model consonant with their belief structure. Even pre- and post-gain measures may be impacted by this possibility. Moreover, our original track, without the increased collaboration with the special education candidates, although not devoid of collaborative training and pedagogy will simply not be as intensive. Despite these potential obstacles, Aurora remains committed to establishing a research base originating with the beginning of the program. In fact, university communities as a group must all work to ascertain if the difficulties suggested by research for the collaborative model in K-12 are a function of a lack of training opportunities and support, or whether co-teaching may not benefit all students with disabilities—or to more clearly articulate its benefits.

Summary Views

Just as both researchers and practitioners have felt that it is critical to establish a shared theoretical perspective to facilitate the changing collaborative role between regular and special education, it may also serve us well as educators to rethink the metaphors that have been used in the past. In a time when we must become more open to a pluralistic society, the old metaphor of a marriage between regular and special education pre-service education programs is no longer adequate. For today's world we must envision an equal union that is a true partnership, wherein each partner brings distinctive strengths while recognizing that an appreciation of differences is our unified strength. Designing programs is not enough; university educators must work continually on expanding partnerships and maintaining openness to potential ongoing transformation—a stance that we, as university educators, teach but perhaps do not always model.

Moreover, to extend the metaphor of partners over marriage further, we, as colleges of education, must broaden our definitions and recognition of whom may be partners, seeking to establish relationships with multiple partners that will allow a bi-lateral exchange of learning between those partners. Aurora, as well as most universities, speaks in prideful tones of its partnerships with K-12 schools and the community—but we all need to evaluate the degree to which we are truly open to an equal partnership, the degree to which we completely listen to and feel we can learn from our colleagues: the community members, the school administrators and teachers, the parents and families, and our students—the latter both K-12 and pre-service candidates. Finally, we cannot forget to be mindful of our own university communities and to what degree we strive to build collaborative partnerships both between education programs and across the disciplines of our own university faculties. This process cannot merely be a matter of designing a special education program on the guiding principle that all children can think and learn, but also that all university educators can learn—that all learning is a socially negotiated process, a collaborative event, the beauty of which is continual transformation for us all.

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