Chapter 2
Designing a Dual Licensure Path for Middle Childhood and Special Education Teacher Candidates

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ABSTRACT
This chapter focused on identifying ways to merge education courses and field hours to create a new dual licensure pathway for Middle Childhood Education and Special Education. The purpose was to adapt two programs to unify the competencies, dispositions, and collaborative practices of each program into one program producing highly effective teacher candidates with a dual license in Middle Childhood Education and Special Education. Attention was given to the importance of educating more teacher candidates with the capacity to meet the needs of all learners with an emphasis on those with exceptionalities and disabilities. The key implications and advantages of the effectiveness of combining a Middle Childhood and Special Education teaching license were apparent in the response from district office personnel, teachers, teacher candidates, and university faculty.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, teacher licensure in special education has been systematized by a base certificate or stand-alone license, an initial license that teachers obtain after completion of a special education teacher education program or sequence of advanced special education courses for a master’s degree with licensure that does not require the teacher to hold an initial general elementary or secondary education license. (Geiger, Mickelson, McKeown, Barton, Kleinhammer-Tramill & Steinbrecher, 2014). Nationally, state teaching licensing have been redesigned in recent years with the establishment of alternative teaching license options, state resident educator programs, and an increase of graduate endorsements for special education, high incidence disabilities, and learning disabilities. Some state departments of education researched and discussed the possibility of eliminating the special education license and developing a special education endorsement to add on to a general education license because the concern was that the teacher candidates require content area preparation. Initial licensure polices in special education have been analyzed to conclude how policies support or encumber reform efforts to develop teacher education programs that prepare graduates for the increasingly complex needs of diverse students (Blanton, Bovedal, Munoz, & Pugach, 2017). Furthermore, initial special education licensure policies are often depicted by highlighting the differences across states on two strategic choices: whether licensure for special education teachers is a stand-alone initial license or whether the state requires a general education license prior to obtaining a second license in special education (Blanton, Bovedal, Munoz, & Pugach, 2017).

This separate approach to the preparation of special education and general education teachers is particularly problematic given that an expanding number of students with disabilities are receiving the majority of their academic instruction within general education classrooms (Anderson, Smith, Olsen, & Algozzine, 2015). For some preparation programs, a response to this gap between existing teacher education structures and the changing landscape of schools and classroom practices has caused faculty to rethink isolated discipline specific training and instead construct collaborative teacher preparation programs commonly referred to in the literature as unified, blended, or merged initiatives (Young, 2011). The elementary and secondary licensure bands are most frequently redesigned by University teacher preparation programs in the United States. However, educators still continue to struggle with the most advantageous way to prepare both general and special education teachers who can teach to high standards for students with disabilities and the influence of the possibilities in relation to contemporary issues facing special education and the compromises made when a particular licensure option is implemented (Blanton, Bovedal, Munoz, & Pugach, 2017). Customarily, teacher candidates must experience an expansive array of learning opportunities during their preparation program or the teacher candidates report feeling underprepared to manage their classroom when they begin teaching (Küster, Bain, Milbrandt, & Newton, 2010).

The growing expectation for students with disabilities to succeed alongside their peers has begun to result in changing roles for both general and special education teachers (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011). Many state licenses and teacher preparation programs address only special education training on the elementary or secondary level. The Association for Middle Level Educators has advocated for examining critical issues impacting middle level education and middle childhood teacher preparation in regard to meeting the needs of all diverse learners. Prospective middle level teachers must be prepared to understand all facets of young adolescents and their cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and moral/character
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