

MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY
PROGRAM REVIEW

Director of Special Education

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the certificate for Director of Special Education program is to prepare candidates to be effective administrators of public school special education programs. It is designed for candidates who have a Master's Degree and who hold a valid teaching certificate in special education.

I. A. Conceptual Framework

See College's statement of the conceptual framework.

B. Program Relation to Conceptual Framework

The special education program and Morehead State University sees the conceptual framework as particularly appropriate metaphor for the role of the special education teacher in today's schools. "Educators as architects: designing environments where students construct knowledge and develop skills," calls on our candidates and faculty to reflect critically on the basic concept of access. Accessibility lies at the heart of special education in the United States. Since 1975, a free appropriate public education has been mandated for all handicapped children. With the 1997 revisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act the intent of this requirement has been underscored by a very explicit emphasis on access to the general curriculum:

... As used in this part, the term special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability...

(3) Specially-designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction-(i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children. (20 U.S.C. 1401(25))

While some see this as a "new" focus in the 1997 reauthorization, in truth it has been at the foundation of special education since its inception is a federal mandate in 1975. In 1975, the issue for students with disabilities was getting into door -- basic access. Twenty-five plus years of experience has taught us to expect more than that for students with disabilities: The expectation for students with disabilities is the same as the expectation for all students: high achievement.

The research literature in special education has consistently demonstrated that the nature of the learning environment can contribute to the success and the acceptance of students with disabilities. As it says in the conceptual framework document the metaphor of the architect is used because it nicely captures the critical role of the teacher in designing, planning, and constructing environments that focus on fostering optimal student learning. This resonates with those of us in special education who have long struggled with the concept of the least restrictive environment as a hallmark of special education and United States. Indeed, the concept of the least restrictive environment tries to strike a balance between the demands of a regular class and the unique learning needs of the student with a disability. At its root, the least restrictive environment is defined as the optimal learning environment for each unique individual.

At the dawn of the 21st century, this challenge is one that has become best encapsulated in the concept of inclusion. Inclusion is the idea that all students belong and all students are members of the school community. No individual difference should be a basis for differential treatment within this accepting community.

Traditionally special education has been associated with a behaviorist paradigm of teaching. Increasingly forward-looking educators throughout the country have challenged this mechanistic approach to the educational enterprise. In our program, we have adopted a social ecological approach that is exactly congruent with our overriding metaphor of educators as architects. From this perspective, a disability is simply a physical or psychological condition which person has. It becomes a "handicap" only when that person encounter in environment that requires him or her to do something that they are unable to do. Guided by this perspective faculty and candidates together examine the social

environment of the school to identify factors that enhance or hamper student acceptance, participation, and success.

Within this framework, there are four critical ideas: **access, participation, inclusion, and preparation for adult life**. The following briefly explores each of these four ideas that flow from our conceptual framework and demonstrates how they are linked with critical outcomes for teachers and students with disabilities.

Access. The concept of access simply captures the fact that the student with a disability needs to be able to enter the school and classroom as a first step towards learning. This requires the teacher in training to become adept at analyzing the environment to diagnose both physical and attitudinal barriers to participation. Maslow's hierarchy of need makes it clear that no human being is capable of achieving if they are not accepted as a valued human being. Beyond answering questions about stereotypical attitudes and physical access the teacher also must develop skills related to more subtle aspects of the classroom environment that hamper student learning. Among these are issues such as the form in which information is presented and access to technological supports that will assist students with special needs.

Participation. It is one thing to get one's foot or one's wheelchair in the door; it is another thing to engage with others in the educational enterprise. This requires a teacher to be attune to the myriad ways in which students with disabilities are limited in their ability to fully participate in what goes on in the school. If special education becomes the "greenhouse" or "plastic bubble" that encapsulates students with disabilities, they never will be challenged to reach their highest potential nor will they be fully accepted by their peers. This requires the teacher to structure of activities within the classroom and use of resources such as instructional aides in ways that support participation. Two skills critical to achieving participation are **collaboration** and **accommodation**. Developing skills in forming collaborative relationships with colleagues in regular education and related services is central to our special education program. In a like manner today's teacher in special education has to be skilled at analyzing learning tasks to design the accommodations which will allow the student with special needs to do his or her best.

Inclusion. Access, participation, collaboration, and accommodations all lay the groundwork for inclusion. However, this is more than a simple linear equation. Inclusion is more than the sum of its parts. All that discussed about up to this point simply lays the foundation for the possibility of full acceptance and student success. Inclusion is not an educational strategy it is an educational outcome. The teacher strives to create in environment in which all our accepted and all contribute. Within the inclusive school, the numerous factors that defined the human condition such as gender, race, religion, economic background, and differential ability are seen as enhancing not detracting from the learning experience of all.

Preparation for adult life. It is critical that all teachers have a sense of direction. All that we do in schools is geared towards preparing our students to be valued contributing members of our communities. The academic expectations for all Kentucky students provide us with a compass in setting this direction. The value of an ecological perspective on education is that it requires the teacher to continually ask "why am I doing what I am doing?" The bottom-line answer to this question is "I am engaged in the enterprise of preparing young people for life beyond the classroom." It is critical for the student with a disability to be prepared to meet the challenges the everyday life will present. Similarly, all students must be prepared for the complexities of a world filled with human difference. The special education program at Morehead State University strive to develop the kinds of "architects" who can build the ramps that will lead all of their future students to success.

C. Excerpts from Syllabi Illustrating Conceptual Framework

EDSP 621	<p>The following major objectives for this course are intended to examine each of the following in relationship to access, participation, inclusion and impact upon the preparation for adult life for diverse learners:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To examine federal and state requirement for the operation of special education programs in the State of Kentucky. 2. To explore laws for regular education and special education. 3. To review litigation regarding special education in the schools.
EDSP622	<p>This course will utilize discussion-oriented reality-based case studies in order to provide opportunities to make judgments in a setting where the consequences of misjudgment are not as great as in an actual situation.</p> <p>This course is intended to examine each of the following in relationship to participation, inclusion and impact upon the preparation for adult life for</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The development of procedures for special education planning and 2. The development of procedures for special education curriculum 3. The development of procedures for special education instruction, 4. The development of procedures for special education management.. <p>The textbook for this course also reveals the intent of inclusion: Weishaar, Mary Konya, & Borsa, John C.(2001). <u>Inclusive Educational Administration: A Case Study Approach</u>. McGraw-Hill, Boston.</p>
EDSP 623	<p>The major objectives of this course will be examined in relationship to each of the following access, participation, inclusion and impact upon the preparation for adult life for diverse learners:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The essentials of effective communication with regular educators; 2. The essentials of effective staff development protocols; 3. The essentials of effective professional development options; 4. The essentials of effective community/public relations; 5. The essentials of effectively working with parents.
EDSP 624	This course is being completely revised.

II. PROGRAM EXPERIENCES

Graduates of this program must demonstrate substantial growth in the skill, knowledge base and application of identified national and state-adopted standards. These identified standards include: Standards for School Leaders Interstate (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1994) and the Curriculum Guidelines for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1996 *Special Education Content Standards* identified by the Council for Exceptional Children (2001). Coursework requires candidates to research effective leadership practices, observe practicing administrators, analyze and develop case studies, and participate in on-site leadership activities, all designed to prepare the graduate to become an effective school leaders. The overlap of the experiences in the required courses is intentional. Candidates are encouraged to build upon and connect projects and assignments in an effort to help them gain an understanding of the many forces that influence leadership actions and

decisions. The following outlines the education courses required in the director of special education program:

Courses in Directors of Special Education Program
EDIL 601. Introduction to School Leadership Administration. A study of modern administrative theories, processes, techniques and responsibilities, with an emphasis on understanding schools as complex organizations and facilitating leadership to create a work climate supportive of excellence in teaching and learning. Emphasis will be given to the organization and administration of the elementary school, middle grade school, and secondary school.
EDIL 628. School Law & Ethics. A study of state and federal laws impacting the administration of school pupils and personnel. An investigation of legal and ethical issues as related to practical problems of school administration.
EDSP 621. Operation of Special Education Programs. (3-0-3); I. The course addresses federal and state regulations, case laws, fiscal management and record keeping.
EDSP 622. Instructional Leadership in Special Education. (3-0-3); II. This course addresses the following areas in instructional leadership: program development and planning, curriculum development, instruction and management.
EDSP 623. Special Education Program Coordination. (3-0-3). This course addresses the following areas: communication with regular educators, staff supervision, professional development, community/public relations and working with parents.
EDSP 624. Practicum (6-0-6); I, II. Supervised practicum experience for directors of special education.

The following matrix outlines those courses or program components that place a particular emphasis on specific ISSLC Standards. The flexibility associated with certain aspects of graduate education means it is not always feasible to associate a growth on a standard with a particular course. In these cases there is a range of opportunities for professional growth that will be available through a group of possible electives.