

Elementary Teacher Education Program Review Report
University of Wisconsin
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Nationally, teacher education is under a significant amount of critique and faces competition by alternative certification providers and other venues to teacher preparation. Despite these challenges, the elementary teacher education program at UW Madison has been able to maintain its current enrollment level. Efforts at diversifying the preservice teacher preparation program continue, including collaboration with other colleges. In an era of diminishing resources, the program has the potential structural and leadership supports and committed teacher education faculty that are needed to continue to excel. A commitment to social justice and developing reflective teachers through a practice-based program are shared values that are visible throughout the program. Faculty, supervisors, and students were very positive about their experiences in and with the program. Students also identified the challenge of negotiating what they learned in course work with the actual practices they observed in schools. The gap between teacher preparation programs and teaching realities of schools is a common struggle for teacher preparation programs.

The last, formal, review of the elementary teacher preparation program was conducted in 2005. In response to the feedback provided then and the mandate to reduce program size and length, the elementary program developed four strands that each enroll a cohort of 25 students each semester. This program model has been implemented since 2012. The central questions in the self-study report were the following:

- How have the program reforms enhanced the Elementary Education program?
- How do they enact the programmatic mission?
- What are its strengths?
- What are its weaknesses?
- Is it sustainable?

The current program review aimed to provide insights about how to maintain and improve the Elementary Education program in a period of changing resources and schooling trends by looking at program design, resources and structures, courses, and student experiences. The program review team visited the UW Madison campus on May 4-6 to meet with various stakeholders and review and discuss various background materials. The program reviewers used the following sources of information to prepare this report: self-study report (2005), syllabi, and interviews with current students, cohort leader faculty, non-cohort leader faculty, supervisors, cooperating teachers, the Dean, and associate Deans for EAS.

As the program review committee considered these data sources, we identified various themes/issues that seemed to cut across the elementary teacher education program. While the themes intersect, we tried to highlight specific elements for each of them. The four themes are: program consistency, roles and responsibilities, partnerships and field placements, and capacity. The reviewers expect that the comments and recommendations below will provide a useful and productive starting point for rich discussions among administrators, faculty, students and others involved with the program.

Theme #1: Program Consistency

While sharing the values of social justice and reflective teaching, the four strands each also have distinct practices and expectations. Three out of the four strands reflected a shared sociocultural approach to teaching and learning and a focus on diverse populations, especially ELLs and, to a lesser extent, students with special needs. This shared approach is a resource to facilitate collaboration and coordination across courses (see below Theme #2 and #3). However, some faculty expressed the need to strengthen the attention given to ESL issues in certain courses (e.g., math) while a stronger focus on EC was needed in science and social studies courses.

The strand that focuses on dual certification in special education and elementary teacher preparation is organized differently as it spans two departments. This strand has a clearly articulated emphasis on students with special needs. In reviewing the syllabi, the program reviewers recommend that faculty consider how the needs of ELLs with special needs could be more visibly included and addressed. Further, we noted in the syllabi and through conversations that different conceptualizations of instruction (e.g., literacy/reading) operate within the strand. Students in the special education program saw tensions in the visions of literacy that co-exist in the program, adding that they do not have enough opportunities to grapple productively with these tensions. We suggest that helping preservice teachers understand, negotiate, and use these differences productively would support coherence within this strand.

Several successful practices were identified by various stakeholders, including the students. These practices are the result of individual faculty initiative and their extended involvement with the program and with specific schools. Examples are:

- Long-standing partnerships with certain individual schools that provide a consistent source for meaningful collaboration and placement for preservice teachers.
- Recent faculty efforts to collaborate within semesters to align assignments in terms of timing, to build shared assignments across courses, and to coordinate course readings.
- Excellent support by experienced supervisors for internship students. They provide feedback, model and facilitate practice, and help students negotiate EdTPA requirements.
- Course content and practicum alignment with the target populations (special education, ELLs, young learners)

Various stakeholders pointed out the powerful positive impact of these features on program quality and student experiences. The program reviewers noted that these experiences do not seem to be consistently available across strands and for each cohort of students. As a consequence, students may have distinctly different experiences depending on the program strand (EC-ESL, MC-ESL, MC-Sped, MC-Content), their particular cohort leader and supervisor(s), and the semester they are in. A shared vision of an effective elementary teacher and what practices would reflect this vision was not consistently communicated, represented, and thus visible within

and across strands. For instance, despite the commitment to social justice and reflective professional practice, students commented on the silence across courses and program components about recent racist incidents on campus. This was seen as a lost opportunity to discuss the role of social justice in professional preparation and its implications for practice.

***Recommendation:** Identify the instructional framework that guides the elementary teacher preparation program. What are the features of high-quality experiences and practices that all students are expected to have and demonstrate as part of their elementary teacher preparation? Which features and practices may be strand-specific? This framework can then be communicated to faculty and students as shared expectations for practica, observation tools (forms), and assignments.*

Theme #2: Roles and Responsibilities

The current program intersects with multiple administrative levels (e.g., Department Chair, academic staff, Dean's Office, other university entities, and district-based personnel) and there are different roles within the program (supervisor, teaching assistant, non-cohort leader faculty member, cohort leader faculty member). It was not always clear to the review team who is responsible for what, what rules and procedures governed various roles, which communication lines have been established among various constituents and hence where students would go for information regarding different aspects of the program. For instance, cooperating teachers need a more explicit orientation on practica requirements and would benefit from discussions early in the semester about course assignments.

***Recommendation:** Create organizational and work flow charts that show lines of communication and roles/responsibilities for different program components and individuals.*

Cohort leaders and practica/internship supervisors play central roles in the elementary TE program. **Cohort leaders** are faculty, often junior faculty, who are the central point person coordinating the program for a cohort for two years. In addition, cohort leaders are expected to organize field placements for their cohort. There was significant variation in how this role is defined and carried out by individual cohort leaders (see Theme #1). As a result, students may

have different experiences in the program and graduate teaching assistants may receive different kinds of supports for teaching and supervising in the program.

***Recommendation:** Clearly delineate the expectations and responsibilities of cohort leaders to strengthen consistency across cohorts and compensate appropriately (e.g., course buyout). If junior faculty are assigned this role, it is important to consider how to best support their trajectory to promotion and tenure.*

***Recommendation:** Clarify responsibilities for field placement, mentor teacher selection, and identifying appropriate sites for each program. Multiple entities are involved with field experiences but there appeared to be little central coordination and leadership. (See also theme #3)*

Supervisors consist almost exclusively of doctoral students. Although there seems to be an understanding that classroom teaching experience is a prerequisite for supervisors, preservice students commented on the fact that they were sometimes supervised by doctoral students without such experience. New supervisors often struggle to understand what was expected from them and their students, what forms need to be completed, how and when. Their assignment was often not explicitly differentiated between supervision and facilitating the practicum seminar. . Clearer guidelines for the focus and implementation of these seminars are needed so that supervisors can balance opportunities to infuse social justice considerations in the curriculum and pedagogy with other key aspects of the program (e.g., EdTPA).

In addition, faculty explained that supervision is a crucial tool to advance the education of doctoral students. Nevertheless, there is no explicit and systematic attention to how the role of supervisors can be leveraged to conduct research, use inquiry findings for program improvement, and enable doctoral students to craft a CV over time that will be competitive for faculty positions in the national job market.

***Recommendation:** Delineate supervisor responsibilities and seminar responsibilities and reflect these consistently in supervisor assignment.*

Recommendation: Identify a central point-person responsible for supervision and the supervisory process. This person could develop a set of central resources for supervisors that outlines their responsibilities as well as those of cooperating teachers and interns/ practicum students, provides the forms and expected timelines for documentation (including EdTPA); provides an initial orientation and on-going opportunities for professional development to improve their skills as supervisors; and offers an archive of effective practices that is renewed on an ongoing basis by the program faculty and supervisors.

Recommendation: Create a program improvement framework that requires ongoing data collection and analysis on key components of the program. A set of overarching questions should be identified to advance a program of research based on these program improvement efforts. An IRB protocol could be approved every academic year to pursue and facilitate these research activities. Supervisors would have opportunities to pursue studies based on this framework. A research seminar for supervisors can be used to support their studies and publish their results.

Theme #3: Partnerships and Placements

UW has a long-standing tradition of professional development schools, initially conceptualized and implemented under the leadership of Ken Zeichner and Carl Grant. The impact that strong partnerships can have on students in the program is evident through the partnerships with specific schools such as Lincoln and White Horse/Schank and committed collaboration and leadership in these schools (e.g., Mary Klehr, Emmett Durtsch). Program reviewers noted varying (implicit and explicit) definitions of the term ‘partnership’, ranging from the two-way professional development school models to one –way conceptualization of schools as a site for university student placement. Faculty and supervisor efforts and presence in schools varied in response to their vision of the partnership and what was possible given faculty resources, relationships, and program goals.

Recommendation: Engage in a strategic discussion of the vision for the university-school partnerships for the Elementary Teacher Education Program and identify specific pathways and

supports needed to build such partnerships with specific attention to the needs of each program strand.

Multiple entities are connected to partnerships with schools and the placement of students in practica and/or internship. At the university level, we identified the following roles: the Associate Dean for Teacher Education, the EAS office, the Partnership School Network, administrative staff working with the elementary program, and individual faculty (cohort leaders), and the role of university-school partnership liaison (one faculty member). At the school level, there are cooperating teachers, learning/teacher coaches, principals. The program review team was unclear about the possible role of individuals at the district level.

Each entity contributes to the overall partnership and coordination of field placements. Exactly what responsibilities each of these entities has in terms of identifying high-quality cooperating teachers, properly documenting student experiences, communicating expectations to supervisors, interns, and mentor teachers, or providing access to appropriate placements remained unclear to the review team. This lack of definition and coordination affects the quality of experience students have in the program. It also builds unnecessary inefficiencies and, in some cases, becomes a burden for faculty (cohort leaders).

Recommendation: *Conduct a work audit of all entities connected to partnerships and field placements in order to more clearly identify a common vision for the essential elements, expectations, norms and procedures of these partnerships--e.g., who is responsible for what as it relates to partnership building and student placement with quality cooperating teachers in partnership schools.*

Recommendation: *Some universities operate some TE-related activities centrally while maintaining program-based decision-making. Such centralized services might include communications regarding field placements, certification requirements, EdTPA or other assessment tasks, ensuring coordinated documentation of student progress and readiness to become a teacher. UW faculty may look at other places to see what alternate structures exist and*

which might work based on their context. (This could also be combined with a Supervisor role – see Theme #2 above).

Theme #4: Capacity

The question of whether the program has the capacity to implement the four strands as currently conceptualized is an important one from the perspective of resource allocation and quality of program implementation. The program review team sees this question from an internal and an external perspective.

Internally, the question relates to whether there is sufficient human resource capacity to provide preservice teachers with the quality program needed to prepare them well for their future roles. The program enrolls 200 students at any point in time; this reflects a significant reduction from the 400 students noted in the 2005 report. The current program structure requires that, on average, 2-3 courses (outside of seminar or practicum) be offered for each cohort in the program. [Since each program strand has two cohorts operating at any given time (those that began in Fall and those that began in Spring), this implies that 4 strands x 2 cohorts x 2-3 courses = 16-24 courses must be offered each semester]

Even if it were possible to allocate at least one course to faculty in each of the content areas each semester (literacy, math, science, social studies/foundations, ELL; i.e., 5 faculty members teaching one cohort), there clearly is a significant need for additional teaching capacity every semester. Meeting this demand while simultaneously maintaining quality control is a challenge. Another variable is the current conceptualization of the four strands as four independent strands. As a result, similarly oriented courses are duplicated rather than combined. In this regard, the challenge for the faculty is to strike a balance between their (1) autonomy and intellectual ownership of the program and (2) agreement to embrace a collective vision that makes possible the standardization of core programmatic elements.

Recommendation: *Consider aligning the three MC stands (MC-ESL, MC-Content, and MC-Sped) to maximize efficient use of existing resources, e.g., which courses could be shared across strands (rather than developing three distinct courses)? Which courses need to be distinct as*

they specialize for certification (special education/ELL)? Examples of shared coursework might be: Introductory course on teaching, foundations of reading/literacy/language, math/science/ELL methods.

Currently, this instructional need is filled with doctoral students who are given a teaching assistantship, typically with a tuition waiver and health insurance. While this allows the program to support PhD students, it is also a costly approach that may not be sustainable. Moreover, the reliance on PhD students is noted by preservice teachers. Despite efforts of the program, many students may still go through the entire program without having been taught by faculty. Incentives for greater faculty participation in this program is clearly needed. In addition, as noted above, because of the ways in which supervisor roles are defined and implemented, some doctoral students might complete their programs with little research experience and minimal opportunities to publish their scholarship.

Recommendation: *Examine how teaching assistants are assigned and mentored for teaching and design a process of providing professional development opportunities to encourage excellence in teaching.*

Recommendation: *Administer a cost-benefit analysis of instructional cost associated with the program, balancing this question out with the vision for the PhD program. Consider whether alternative staffing options (e.g., clinical faculty) might provide more consistency and access to effective mentors and to building of sustainable relationships with schools.*

Capacity is also an *external* issue which relates particularly to the nature of Madison's public schools and the kinds of placements that the district affords the program. When the program moved from 5 semesters to 4 semesters, faculty made a distinct effort to maintain a strong practice-based component. Students are in a practicum each semester (1.5 days) before their full-time internship. Aside from the established partner schools, there is a challenge to identify appropriate placements so that preservice teachers will have appropriate experiences with students with special needs and ELLs at the appropriate age level. There emerged a question whether a sufficient number of appropriate placements and mentor teachers can indeed be

provided through the Madison's public school system. Resolving this challenge will require improved coordination of placements and partnerships. It could also include the exploration of alternative collaborative structures with personnel, e.g., the role in partnerships of clinical faculty (see Theme #2).

***Recommendation:** Explore options for practicum placements outside of the Madison public schools, in addition to improved coordination of field experiences and expanding of current options.*