

1. Title - Delivering Culturally Diverse Special Education/English Language Learner Teacher Training Programs Via Distance Education in Rural and Remote Areas
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**Delivering Culturally Diverse Special Education/English Language Learner  
Teacher Training Programs Via Distance Education in Rural and Remote Areas**

The 22nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA Act (USDE, 2000) noted significant personnel shortages in special education. With predictions of even more serious teacher shortages in the next several years, there is an especially critical need for additional special education teachers for CLDE students in rural areas (USDE, 2000). In addition, the current emphasis on providing nondiscriminatory assessment procedures and assessing the effectiveness of multicultural instructional programs is drawing attention to the efficacy of traditional special education and general education teacher training programs which typically do not offer systematically integrated coursework and practicum experiences specific to the multicultural

characteristics of students with disabilities (Baca & Cervantes,1998; DeMarrais & LeCompte,1995; Carey, 1998; Fuhler, & Carey 1998; Rosenberg & Rock, 1994).

Dramatic changes are taking place in America's public schools and today's educators must be prepared to teach students who are more likely to be a member of racial or ethnic groups (Voltz, Dooley & Jefferies, 1999). To appropriately serve the growing CLDE population in the country, it is essential that regular and special education teachers are provided additional training with a multicultural focus (Fletcher, Bos & Johnson, 1999).

The single largest group of non-English background children in the U.S. is Hispanic. Of the LEP population, 75% of these children are native Spanish speakers (Baca & Cervantes, 1998). In Arizona, as of the 1990 census, there are over 688,338 Hispanics making up 18.8% of the population. In addition, a disproportionately high number of students with disabilities in states like Arizona are Hispanic. Hispanic families are poorer than average in these states, they tend to be more mobile than Anglo families, and they drop out of school three times as often as Anglo children.

According to the last U.S. Census, about 5.6% of the nation's citizens are Native Americans. Often school districts charged to serve Native American students are faced with an inability to attract well trained special education personnel for reservation-based schools due to perceived living conditions and travel distances. The majority of teachers in reservation schools are typically non-Native American, first-year teachers. For example, the Navajo Nation reported employing 1,128 teachers in the 1998-99 school year and only 321 of these teachers were Navajo. Training for American Indians remains the area of greatest need in special education staffing for over a decade (USDE, 2000). The Navajo Nation is one example in which special education training for general

education teachers, especially those familiar with the Navajo culture and language would be very beneficial. According to the 1998-1999 Statistics on Navajo (Diné) Education (Izzo, 1999), 823 certified special education teachers are employed and only 87 or 11% of these certified teachers are Navajo. Non-Native American teachers typically do not teach for more than three years on the reservation. Thus, high teacher turnover rates create problems with program development and continuity. Conversely, Native American teachers typically remain in their Native communities because of cultural and family systems. Unfortunately, recruitment efforts on the part of university training programs have yielded relatively few Native American individuals pursuing careers in special education in traditional campus-based programs.

When special education teachers from traditional university programs are hired on the reservation, they have little or no specialized training in the area of best practice in assessment, curriculum, and methods for Native American children and adolescents. Using standardized instruments to assess the eligibility and classification of culturally/linguistically diverse students for special education services has been found by many researchers to be biased (Baca & Cervantes, 1998; Common & Frost, 1990; Miller-Jones, 1989; and Ruiz & Figueroa, 1995). It is critical that the professionals administering and interpreting assessment results are fluent in the student's culture and language as well as competent in the area of Bilingual Multicultural Special Education. In many areas of the country, Native Americans are over represented in special education services by 50 percent (Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 1995) and underrepresented in Gifted and Talented Education programs by 100 percent (Romero, 1994) because professionals are unaware of the effects language and culture have on assessment.

The national shortage of special education teachers and general education teachers with training in special education is especially critical in rural areas (Westling & Whitten, 1996). Two major factors exacerbate this problem. First, most of the teachers who relocate to teach in these areas are unfamiliar/uncomfortable with the challenges of the rural multicultural classroom and rarely stay long. Second, many of the individuals familiar with these types of classrooms (individuals from the community) lack the resources and accessibility to courses needed to obtain their special education teaching certificate. . “[R]etaining personnel who are already employed is the surest way to reduce the problem of how few people are out there to be hired. Administrators must spend excessive amounts of time recruiting and hiring, investments in inservice training are wasted, and service quality suffers when programs are revolving doors for employees” (CSPD, 1995-99, p. 22). According to the CSPD report, “Language and dialectical difference add to the challenge of providing personnel development opportunities, especially in rural and remote areas where recruiting and maintaining quality personnel is a constant concern” (CSPD, 1995-99, p. 21).

**Session Objectives:** The purpose of this session is to provide examples of special education teacher training programs, delivered via distance education technology, which are rural multicultural field-based university/school partnerships. Teacher educators must be aware of the challenges and promising practices related to preparing teachers to serve exceptional students from culturally diverse backgrounds in rural and remote areas. The teacher preparation programs described in this session are serving culturally diverse students with disabilities in rural areas of Arizona. These areas include Yuma, near the Mexico border, and Tuba City on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations. It is challenging for

these districts to recruit and retain special education teachers, especially those from culturally diverse backgrounds. This session will describe five innovative programs (BEST, LEAP, DREAMS, RISE, and BRIDGE) which train Mexican-American and Native American local paraprofessionals and general education teachers to become special education teachers in their own rural and remote communities. The programs described in this session are specifically designed to prepare culturally diverse teachers to address the assessment and instructional needs of culturally diverse students with disabilities in rural areas.

These programs address the needs of rural culturally diverse Mexican-American and Native American students with disabilities through:

1. developing a distance education Bachelors degree and a Masters degree program in Multicultural Special Education/Elementary Education and training special educators who will have cross-categorical certification in Special Education and Elementary Education to work with Mexican-American and Native American special education children and their parents;
2. training Mexican-American and Native American paraprofessionals and general education teachers from high poverty, rural areas to be certified special education teachers;
3. providing distance education training where the trainees live and work in remote, high poverty, multicultural settings thus fully preparing the trainees for the realities of work with rural culturally and linguistically diverse students;

4. focusing on collaborative methods of delivering special education services thus meeting the intent of the least restrictive environment/maximum extent appropriate clause of I.D.E.A. and the philosophical tenets of inclusion.

#### OBJECTIVES OF CONFERENCE SESSION

- A. An overview of the multicultural partnership programs will be presented along with a description of the cultural diversity activities and distance education technologies utilized in these programs.
- B. Challenges facing teacher educators in rural, remote areas will be described, and we will share what we have learned from the programs we have been implementing for the past several years.
- C. Ideas for replication in other rural districts/universities and one on one discussion will be encouraged.
- D. Examples of culturally diverse activities which can be incorporated into a teacher training program and into rural classrooms will be demonstrated.

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