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Title: Teacher Preparation in Early Childhood Special Education: Providing Emphasis in Low Incidence Disabilities within a Multicategorical Service Delivery System

Author Name: Sherwood J. Best, Ph.D.
Author Affiliation: Division of Special Education
Author Address: Charter College of Education
5151 State University Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90032
Author e-mail: sbest@calstatela.edu

Author Name: Tina Arora, MA
Author Affiliation: UCLA
Author Address: Graduate School of Education and Information Studies
Moore Hall, Student Commons
Westwood
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521
Author e-mail: tarora@ucla.edu

Abstract:

The current emphasis on inclusion of infants and young children with special needs in natural environments presents particular challenges for personnel who provide early education. To address the necessary competencies engendered by inclusion and ongoing teacher shortages, some institutions of higher education have developed and implemented unified general and special education early childhood programs. However, most states continue to support separate early childhood special education programs. Interventionists who complete these programs receive training to work with infants and young children who possess a variety of disabilities.

Certification programs in early childhood special education are typically noncategorical. Many teachers, administrators, and teacher educators support the flexibility and teaching opportunities offered by noncategorical teacher preparation programs. However, these individuals continue to report the need for a knowledge base specific to disabilities and appropriate related instructional adaptations. The concern about disability specific teacher preparation is particularly strong in the area of low incidence disabilities, including visual impairment and blindness, physical/health impairments, and hearing impairments.

This presentation evaluates the content and efficacy of a three-year, federally funded personnel preparation program that included emphasis in three low incidence areas (visual impairments, physical/health impairments, and hearing impairments) for candidates in an early childhood special education program. Follow-up data are presented that evaluate the lasting efficacy of low incidence disability training in early childhood special education.