

Center for Academic Innovation Teaching Grant Application

New Course Development in the Special Education Program:

Methods for Exceptional Learners

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Several years ago, the special education teaching licensure framework changed in Indiana, allowing colleges and universities to implement licensure programs based on a new set of standards specific to “level of intervention” needed to optimize learning for students with disabilities. Institutions wishing to add special education to their offerings submit a proposal to the Indiana Division of Educator Licensing and Development (of the Department of Education), aligning content of coursework to the appropriate standards. During the 2006-2007 academic year, I wrote the state program proposal for Saint Mary’s College to offer a dual licensure program in Elementary Education and Special Education: Mild Interventions. This was submitted to this office in the spring, and reviewed by members of the state Teacher Education Committee. On October 19, I presented the program to this committee in Indianapolis and after a minor revision, the program was approved.

During the same period of time and after approval of a prospectus by then Vice President and Dean of Faculty Jill Vihtelic in consultation with President Mooney, I submitted the program and preliminary syllabi for four new courses and two revised

courses to the College Curriculum Committee; both the program and syllabi have been approved at Saint Mary's. I am currently on sabbatical focusing on development of one new course, Ed 368: Elementary Methods for Exceptional Learners: Mild Disabilities. As a part of the sabbatical, I am involved in a yearlong training (June 2007 – June 2008) in multisensory teaching of reading; initial certification in this method also involves 100 hours of practicum experience with students who have dyslexia. I plan to incorporate the content of this training into the aforementioned course, teaching it for the first time during the 2008 – 2009 academic year. While the course will largely focus on methods for teaching reading/language arts to students needing mild intervention strategies, it will also incorporate math, social studies, and science.

Specific Aims

My goal for Ed 368 is to empower preservice teachers with knowledge and techniques to build on student strengths and remediate areas of weakness. The aims of this teaching grant application are to secure funding for development and purchasing of materials that are needed to teach the course. These materials relate to not only preservice teachers' knowledge of methods specific to students with disabilities, but to their understanding of assessment as well. Specific objectives are:

- 1.) **To create a library of books and relevant articles** for use both as reference sources for me and for students to access when fulfilling course and field work assignments. Funding would be used to purchase professional books related to general instructional methods for students with mild disabilities, and also for compilation/ duplication of articles and other materials. Because special education is a new area of focus for the department, there are very few reference books and

related materials currently available for use. Cost of this could range from \$800 - \$1000.

2.) **To purchase published instructional resource materials** which are necessary to successfully teach the course. In addition to videos (estimated cost of \$400), these include:

*Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment. Used by many school districts to evaluate early reading skills such as phonemic awareness, the tool costs approximately \$300 per grade level ranging from kindergarten to grade 2 (at least one grade level should be purchased as a start-up, but ideally more than one).

*Tutronics EZ-Prep 3.0 software. This tool, which provides a 16,000 word database, provides appropriate words organized according to orthographic generalizations. A valuable resource for me to use when teaching the reading methods part of the course, it could also be used by students as they create lessons according to a systematic and explicit framework. Cost is approximately \$200.

*Lexia software. This package supplements reading instruction by giving dyslexic students practice in specific reading/language arts skills. It is one of many packages that preservice special education teachers should be aware of and know how to use. Cost is approximately \$159 per software package (I would purchase at least one of two – “Lexia Primary Reading “ or “Lexia Strategies for Older Students”).

*Sets of children’s books from Flyleaf Publishing Company. These are sets of controlled readers that preservice teachers can use with students in their field

placements as they teach basic literacy skills. Set one which consists of eight books is \$44.75 and set two, which consists of 10 books, is \$89.50.

*Miscellaneous items such as sand trays for demonstration of the reading methods, individual dry erase boards, manipulative materials for math and science, etc. Cost could range from \$50-\$100.

Method

Since I am currently working on the course while on sabbatical, I am developing a semester-long framework for instruction, foci for course components related to the various content areas, and lecture outlines/powerpoints for class sessions. While I already know many of the materials necessary to implement the teaching as indicated above, I hope to find others as I talk with teachers in the field. If this grant is received, I would begin to order materials during the summer and fall; as the course is currently scheduled for spring of 2009, this would allow everything to be ready by then.

Significance of the Project

The content of this methods course is based on current research and clearly delineated mandates at the national and state levels. Incorporating the multisensory reading methodology with its focus on phonemic awareness and phonics, is based on research of the National Reading Panel (and reported through No Child Left Behind), which identified five essential components of reading instruction and also the importance of “systematic, explicit” presentation of skills to struggling learners. It is also based on recent brain research on dyslexia, which shows the importance of creating neural pathways for learning through simultaneous involvement of the senses. The Indiana standards for

Teachers of Students with Exceptional Needs: Mild Interventions, with which all the courses were aligned and on which they were approved, call for teachers knowing “evidence-based practices to address the unique learning styles of individuals” in standard 3. As the methods course in the new Mild Interventions program, it is critical that Ed 368 adhere to all of these prescriptions. Preservice special education teachers’ understanding of these methods is integral to their success as student teachers and future teachers; having the related materials, resources, and assessment tools described above is a crucial part of my effective instruction in the course.

Previous Work Related to the Project

The following experiences are related to this project:

- *Undergraduate major in special education and elementary education.
- *Public school teaching positions at both the elementary and secondary levels in special education.
- *New course development – Ed 356 Educating Exceptional Learners in Middle School/Junior High/Secondary School (supported by CFAI teaching grant – 1996)
- *Teaching of Ed 354 Educating Exceptional Learners since 1994
- *Teaching of courses related to Ed 354 (Corrective Reading, Educating Exceptional Learners in Middle School/Junior High/Secondary Schools)
- *Publication of book, *Children’s Literature for the Primary Inclusive Classroom* – 2000 (with M. Traxler)
- *Development of and approval for dual licensure program in Elementary Education/Special Education: Mild Interventions (including preliminary syllabi for four new courses)
- *Training in several multisensory reading programs, including Orton-Gillingham (described above)

Saint Mary's College Grant-Supported Work Related to the Project:

1996 Teaching Grant – “Strategies for Inclusive Environments: The Middle School/Secondary Classroom” (for new course Ed 356)

1996 COSTAR Grant – “Development of Teacher Resource Materials in Mathematics for Use with Students with Disabilities” (with D. Balka)

2001 COSTAR Grant – “College Students with Learning-Related Difficulties: Providing Resources to Faculty and Students” (with C. Pittman)

2004 Teaching Grant – “Improving Literacy Development in Struggling Readers and Writers: Redesigning Corrective Reading”

Bibliographical Resources

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- Vail, P.L. (1992) *About dyslexia: Unraveling the myth*. Rosemont, NJ: Modern Learning Press.
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