

## Preparing Future Teacher-Leaders: Experiences from the University of Connecticut's Five-Year Teacher Education Program

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### In the Beginning

In 1987, faculty and administration in the School of Education at the University of Connecticut began the process of reexamining and redesigning its traditional four-year teacher preparation program. The process involved extensive discussions and debate among School of Education faculty, K–12 teachers, and administrators from public schools throughout Connecticut. As a result of these conversations, and informed by the writings and principles of the Holmes Group (1986, 1990), and John Goodlad and his colleagues at the National Network for Educational Renewal (1991), the teacher preparation program was transformed into a five-year program. Today, the program, called the Integrated Bachelor's/Master's (IB/M) Teacher Preparation, is a highly competitive and nationally recognized teacher preparation program that integrates coursework, school-based clinic experiences, and university and K–12 faculty in the preparation of pre-service teachers.

### IB/M Program Structure

Although the IB/M program has evolved in several ways since its inception, the foundation of the program has remained stable. The program was designed with the following tenets or principles in mind.

- ❖ A broad liberal arts background with a specific subject matter major is a part of each pre-professional student's university program.
- ❖ A common core of pedagogical knowledge is required of all education majors, regardless of their area of specialization.
- ❖ Subject and grade-level specific pedagogical knowledge is tailored to the certification area toward which students are working.
- ❖ Teaching competence is built across six semesters of pro-

gressively challenging clinical experiences.

- ❖ Every student participates in at least one clinic placement in an urban setting, one clinic placement in a special education setting, and one K–12 clinical experience.
- ❖ Analysis of and reflection on the interplay between student characteristics, teacher practices, and the broader issues and concerns of parents and society are essential in preparing educators to be decision makers, leaders, and innovators for the twenty-first century.

A major component of the IB/M program is the relationship with selected public school districts known as Professional Development Centers (PDCs). Today, the Neag School of Education has entered into partnerships with PDCs spread across central and northeastern Connecticut. PDCs are comprised of elementary, middle, and high schools within each of six districts—three urban centers and three suburban centers. Through these relationships, university faculty, administrators, K–12 teachers, and pre-service teachers work collaboratively in promoting simultaneous renewal in the 0K–12 partner schools and the IB/M program.

Throughout the program, learning experiences are structured into 3 main components: core courses, clinical experiences, and seminars. Core courses provide students with a foundation in essential pedagogical and epistemological knowledge. Clinical experiences provide students with the opportunity to teach in K–12 classrooms in urban and suburban settings. Finally, seminars help students integrate what they are learning in their core classes with their experiences in their clinic. This integrated strand provides a structure for professional growth, reflection, inquiry, and leadership throughout the 3 years of the program. While these three components form the organizational structure for each of the three years of the IB/M program, the theme and focus of each year of the

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program is unique, building upon one another, with the goal of developing teachers who are reflective, analytic practitioners.

### **Program Sequence**

All students applying to the program must have a strong grounding in the liberal arts and also complete a subject area major. This is usually completed in their Freshman and Sophomore years. Students enter the program in their Junior year. In this first year, termed “Student as Learner”, all students, regardless of grade level and content area specializations, take *core* courses designed to help them learn about students as learners (e.g., learning theory, assessment, issues of exceptionality, etc.) and about schools as social institutions. These courses are designed to build a solid knowledge base that will be useful to prospective teachers of special and regular education, of elementary and secondary students, and of any content area. The *clinic* assignment in this initial phase of the program is four hours each week spent in a PDC school each semester. Finally, the *seminar* course is designed to bridge the gap between the core courses and the clinic placement. Each semester in seminar, students have the opportunity through discussions to reflect on what they are learning in their core courses and how it is connected to what they are doing in the schools.

During the Senior year, termed “Student as Teacher”, students begin to focus their studies and their clinic experiences in their certification area. At this point, students are learning methods of teaching (core courses) and how to design lessons and units that are developmentally appropriate for a given group of students. During the fall semester, students spend at least six hours per week in a PDC school while in the spring semester students are involved in a full semester student teaching experience (clinic placements). This is important to note because student teaching, which frequently takes place at the conclusion of most four-year programs, occurs at the midpoint of the IB/M program. The placement of the student-teaching semester midway through the program allows students to reflect upon their experiences and try out new teaching techniques in their fifth-year internship. Finally, *seminar* courses are in place each semester with discussions

centering on aspects of teaching and the student teaching experience.

In the Master’s year, termed “Teacher as Leader,” there is a significant change in the level of responsibility and autonomy assumed by the IB/M student. The twin themes of the final year of the program are *Leadership* and *Inquiry*. The clinic experience in the Master’s Year is known as the Internship. Students work 20 hours per week in their internships for the entire academic year. Internships have been designed and proposed by school district personnel to meet the needs and interests of the school district in which the internship takes place. Typically, internships place IB/M students in leadership roles, working collaboratively with teachers and administrators in designing and implementing curricula and special programs. For example, in one urban PDC several interns were recruited to establish a tutoring center to assist students having difficulty on the Connecticut Mastery Tests. In addition to functioning as a teacher leader in an educational setting, the internship provides an opportunity for the IB/M student to conduct a significant piece of professional inquiry in the form of an Inquiry Project. University faculty, in conjunction with clinical faculty, guide students in the conceptualization, development, implementation, and writing of these projects. Through the process of completing the inquiry project, students learn how, when, and why to use inquiry as a tool for professional growth. Ideally, inquiry projects address issues and question of genuine interest and concern to teachers and administrators connected to the internship.

### **Changes to the Program**

Since the program’s inception, the philosophical underpinnings of the program have remained unchanged. Further, the curriculum of the program has remained relatively intact with few programmatic changes; however, the nature of our relationship with our PDCs has shifted dramatically over the past few years.

The teacher education reform initiatives of the 1980’s believed that those responsible for the preparation of teacher educators needed to be in schools working collaboratively with administrators, K–12 teachers, and pre-service teachers in promoting school reform. The framers of

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the IB/M program adopted this view and believed strongly that university faculty should work closely with K–12 teachers in PDC schools in the preparation of IB/M students. As a result, university faculty teaching in the IB/M program normally spent one to two days a week in schools affiliated with a PDC in the role of PDC coordinator. In this role, faculty would oversee and monitor the day-to-day operations of PDC schools (normally 4–5 schools per PDC) and act as the university liaison to the schools. In addition, PDC coordinators would visit with K–12 teachers and IB/M students in their clinic assignments as well as provide professional development activities to K–12 teachers in the schools.

Professional Development Centers tend to go through 5 stages in their development—getting organized, achieving early success, waiting for results, achieving major success and expansion, and developing a mature partnership (Clark, 1999). Some PDCs experience a sixth stage “...a stage of decline, decay, and death” (Clark, 1999, 50). The PDCs in the IB/M program experienced the first 5 stages; however, in the late 1990’s many of the PDCs were on the verge of stage 6. At that time involvement in our PDC schools began to unravel—the number of PDC schools became unwieldy and university faculty presence in the schools began to decline, with a number of faculty opting out of the role of PDC coordinator.

It was clear to the caretakers of the program that a change was needed in order to maintain our relationship with our partner schools and our commitment to a high quality teacher education program. A plan was developed and phased in during the 2001–2002 academic year. To begin the process the number of PDCs was reduced to its current total of 6—three urban and three suburban districts with no more than 3 to 4 schools per district. Next, the Neag School of Education decided to invest in doctoral students as clinical faculty in the IB/M program. In this capacity doctoral students in our education programs were recruited to become PDC coordinators and to teach an undergraduate seminar course. These advanced doctoral students are all experienced teachers and are preparing to become future professors of teacher education. The decision to use doctoral students in this manner at first appeared risky but the rationale to do so was sound. We believed that the

experience of running a PDC would serve these students well as the next generation of future teacher educators. To help these students adjust to their new role, a seminar class was developed and taught by senior faculty involved in the IB/M program. The course addressed a variety of educational issues as well as opportunities for these students to reflect on their own teaching in the program and the day-to-day operations involved in running a PDC. The course has become a requirement of all doctoral students involved in the preparation of IB/M students. In addition to the benefit to our doctoral students, we believe this new model will provide faculty with the opportunity to become involved in our PDC schools (either through direct involvement with IB/M students or research activity) as well as serving as a model to other teacher preparation programs at research I institutions.

### **Evidence of a High Quality Teacher Preparation Program**

The document, *No Dream Denied—A Pledge to America’s Future* (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future [NCTAF], 2003), describes 6 characteristics of a high quality teacher preparation program—careful selection of teacher candidates, strong academic preparation for teaching, extensive clinical practice, support for beginning teachers, appropriate integration of technology, and assessment as a tool to gauge program effectiveness. The IB/M program at the University of Connecticut has been recognized as one such program (NCTAF, 2003).

Admission to the IB/M program has grown more competitive every year. Each year between 700 and 800 freshmen enter the University in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences as pre-education majors. Many of these students choose not to apply to the IB/M program at the end of their sophomore year because they are aware how competitive admission to the program is. On average, 300 students end up competing for 130 openings in the program that begins in the fall of their junior year. Information considered by the admissions committee includes students’ grades and progress toward their academic major, writing samples, letters of recommendation, evidence of work with children and adolescents, and an interview process. The

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academic profile of students admitted to this year's entering class included an average GPA of 3.4/4.0 in their arts and sciences coursework and an average combined SAT score of approximately 1200. It is also noteworthy that 11% of the admitted students in this class were from underrepresented populations, which places the school at the highest percentage of minority enrollment in teacher education institutions in Connecticut (Lewis, 2002).

Another feature of the IB/M program is that all students are well grounded in a subject area major. With a strong background in the liberal arts, students possess a high degree of breadth and depth of knowledge. It is in the nature, content, and sequence of their education courses that students learn from one another and program faculty. These courses build over three years and allow students to build and expand upon their knowledge and beliefs in a logical and meaningful way (Norlander, Case, Reagan, Campbell & Strauch, 1997).

Students in the IB/M program participate in six semesters of progressively challenging clinical experiences. This sequence of experiences helps students make the transition from observers and learners about schools to leaders who will assume responsibility as change agents in schools. Through their clinical work IB/M graduates have participated in over 210 full school days of clinical experience—experience that has been closely monitored by both veteran classroom teachers and university supervisors. More importantly, since these experiences range from urban to rural, elementary to secondary, and regular to special education, students have acquired a deep understanding of the day-to-day routines of classrooms as well as the organizational structure of schools. This knowledge, coupled with confidence developed through clinic experiences, increases the likelihood they will experience success their first years out in the teaching profession.

Outcome measures indicate that the IB/M graduates are among the most sought after teachers in the nation. Each year 96% to 100% of all graduates obtain teaching jobs and many receive multiple offers. This compares to the national average of just over 50%. More impressive is that 90% of IB/M graduates are still teaching after 3 years and 88% are still teaching after 5 years. Again, this far exceeds the national

average, which indicates half of new teachers leave the profession in their first five years (NCTAF, 2003). IB/M graduates also have maintained a 100% pass rate on all state mandated tests and beginning teacher portfolio assessments. These data, as well as onsite evaluations by outside experts, have led to the IB/M program being identified as a model for teacher education reform (e.g., NCATF, 2003; Fullan, Galluzzo, Morris & Watson, 1998).

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

While the IB/M program has been recognized nationally as a model teacher preparation program, it continues to face challenges, as many schools of education do. These challenges include responding to the state's call to certify more teachers in critical shortage areas while upholding the high standards of the IB/M program, sustaining the university-school partnerships which are critical to our success, collaborating with Arts and Sciences faculty, and developing a more comprehensive and cohesive assessment system to measure student progress and inform programmatic changes.

### **Responding to Teacher Shortages**

The need for additional avenues for qualified individuals to become classroom teachers has been well documented at both the state and federal levels. There are already a number of critical shortage areas in Connecticut, and both the degree of shortage and variety of areas affected are certain to increase in the next decade. Current estimates are that there will be a shortage of perhaps as many as 2 million teachers over the next decade in the United States. In Connecticut, rising enrollments in traditional teacher education programs make clear that there are significant numbers of individuals interested in and attracted to teaching careers. As a way of providing an alternative pre-service educational experience for more mature individuals who are not able to participate in the IB/M program, the Neag School of Education developed a Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates (TCPCG). This program was carefully designed to provide an alternative to the IB/M program for limited numbers of well-qualified individuals who have already completed an undergraduate subject area degree in a teach-

ing/certification area. The TCPCG program is a three-semester, 45-credit program, beginning with two intensive sessions during the summer followed by a full year of additional work, which culminates in an MA degree and the University's recommendation for certification. The TCPCG program is philosophically and structurally aligned with the IB/M program—that is, students are expected to have a strong content knowledge preparation, engage in multiple and varied clinic experiences, and conduct inquiry into their teaching and the nature of schools.

### **University-School Partnerships**

Sustaining a strong and dynamic relationship with our PDC schools is an integral part of the IB/M program. The recruiting and training of high-level doctoral students to become the caretakers of the PDCs as well as teach in the program will be a constant challenge to those in charge of the program. Also, the limits of the doctoral student's involvement in the IB/M program will need to be assessed over time.

Faculty exchanges (i.e., university faculty and K–12 teachers) and the recruitment of clinical faculty to teach in the program will help insure that “simultaneous renewal” is more than a slogan of our program. Such exchanges and interaction with K–12 teachers provide grounding to our program that is invaluable to the preparation of our IB/M students.

Finally, one of our most important challenges is the development of a comprehensive and systematic research agenda on teaching and learning that can help inform our IB/M program. Engaging university faculty, administrators, K–12 teachers, and IB/M students in this effort will be difficult. Nevertheless, such an agenda will be essential as we look to the future of our program.

### **Engagement with Arts and Sciences Faculty**

Currently, students in the IB/M program interact with College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) faculty in General Education courses during their first two years at the university, and then in content courses in their major in the third and fourth year in the program. Developing a broader capacity for the engagement of CLAS faculty with Neag School of

Education faculty in order to improve the depth of subject matter understanding of IB/M students is an important next step in the development of the IB/M program.

### **Assessing Our Progress**

Developing a culture that respects evidence as a means to assess and impact teacher effectiveness, pupil performance, and decision making at the curricular and school-wide levels is essential to the preparation of prospective teachers. Maintaining a comprehensive and cohesive assessment system that collects and analyzes data on teacher candidate qualifications, and candidate performance while in the program as well as in the profession after graduation, and that allows us to evaluate and improve the program is essential to high quality teacher preparation programs. The challenge in maintaining such a system is one of resources—human, financial, and technological. The technological know-how and infrastructure to maintain such a system is costly and difficult to implement; however, an effective assessment system is critical to the well being of a school of education and the preparation of future teachers and should be viewed as a necessary and valuable investment.

### **Final Remarks**

In recent years, educators, parents, and the media, have chronicled the problems of the American educational system and the poor performance of U.S. students on national and international tests. A large portion of the blame for the failure of the public schools has been directed at those entrusted to the preparation of teachers—that is, schools of education. The leaders of the teacher education reform initiatives of the 1980s understood that a restructuring of teacher preparation was necessary in order for schools of education to survive. These leaders also believed that effective teacher preparation programs could prepare teachers to meet the demands and high standards necessary to prepare students to become productive citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further, they understood that high quality teacher preparation programs will require that students acquire a strong subject matter knowledge base, as well as a thorough understanding of teaching and learning; that university faculty collaborate with administrators and teachers in K–12

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partner schools in the preparation of pre-service teachers; and that schools of education develop a culture of research and evidence to monitor, assess, and improve their programs and teacher candidates. The University of Connecticut teacher preparation program began this process over 15 years ago. Over this period of time the program has evolved and will continue to evolve as we monitor and assess our progress to insure that the Neag School of Education not only survives, but continues as a model teacher preparation program at the national level.

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