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# An exploratory assessment of a graduate early childhood special education dual certification program

Claudia Mejia

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AN EXPLORATORY ASSESSMENT OF A GRADUATE EARLY CHILDHOOD  
SPECIAL EDUCATION DUAL CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

by

Claudia Mejia

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Rowan University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Education Leadership

February 2011

Glassboro, NJ

Rowan University

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## DEDICATION

To my husband, parents, and family.

Thank you for your continuous support throughout the entire doctoral program. You all have been supportive and proud of my work. I would not have been able to complete the program without the encouragement, strength, love, and patience that each of you instilled in me. You all gave me the inspiration to set high goals, including the confidence to achieve them. I am grateful to have such a wonderful family.

## ABSTRACT

Claudia Mejia

### AN EXPLORATORY ASSESSMENT OF A GRADUATE EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION DUAL CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

February 2011

Martin W. Sharp, Ed.D.

Educational Leadership

The purposes of this action research study was to assess an urban university's graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program and find ways to improve the program in order to facilitate growth and success for all of the students. The research design included both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, which were in the forms of a questionnaire and interviews. Other colleges' and universities' graduate programs in Early Childhood Special Education dual certification were also analyzed to determine if they were similar to the urban university and met the students' needs and standards.

Data collected from the questionnaire and interviews showed that there was much strength, but also some weaknesses in the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program at the urban university. While many students felt they were prepared to teach in multiple settings, others did not. Some colleges and universities offered similar courses, but integrated different curriculum areas including reading, math, science, and technology within early childhood, special education, and inclusion settings.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I would like to thank the chair of my committee, Dr. Martin W. Sharp, for never giving up on me and prodding me to move forward in the dissertation process. His insightful comments and constructive criticisms helped me stay focused and achieve the end results of my dissertation.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Being a teacher in today's society requires extensive education and preparation. The researcher has been an adjunct professor for the early childhood department in an urban university in New Jersey for over six years and has witnessed various changes in the certification process, including dual certification. Many of the researcher's students participate in the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program; the researcher strived to improve the program and wanted to ensure that the early childhood department was providing effective training and strategies in both areas of their study. The researcher also wanted to ensure that the students were confident in their preparation to teach in multiple settings.

As the researcher began to do research and read literature, she noticed that many novice teachers felt unprepared to teach in multiple settings. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education surveyed 3,500 teachers, and four out of five felt they were unprepared to teach in a classroom setting (The George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2001). Of those teachers, more than one third did not have a degree in the subject they taught and/or did not receive enough training. According to a report from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, a survey found that first-year teachers felt they lacked preparation in two areas: "teaching students with special needs and dealing with a cultural diverse classroom" (Rochkind et al., 2008, p. 7).

Many colleges and universities teach dual certification programs differently, causing students to develop different skills during their teacher preparation coursework.

Some college programs have unrelated courses that focus too much on theory with little connection to teaching practice (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Kerns (1996) used data from graduates at the University of New Hampshire and outside of New Hampshire to address the need for better preparation in dual certification programs. A survey on dual certification was taken by individuals who worked on committees for undergraduate and graduate programs in the education departments of universities in New Jersey. Some made negative comments, which included, “dual certification programs were developed without a thoughtful and deliberate action plan; fitting all that needs to be covered within the 30 credit cap continues to be a problem; things are taught differently in P-3 and K-5” (Rice & McLaughlin, 2007, p. 7).

The researcher’s first cycle began in the fall semester of 2009. The target population included graduate students currently enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase or those with 18 credits or more. Students were solicited from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> phase classes. As of summer 2009, there were only 29 students currently enrolled in the program and seven students who recently graduated from the program. Approximately 19 graduate students, male or female, participated in this study. All these students completed a questionnaire and were interviewed.

This population fitted the larger picture of the early childhood and special education departments, both of which are very important areas in education. The researcher studied this area because she believed preschool through grade three are the most significant years for children to learn. There are children in those grades who are classified and need to be taught by competent and highly qualified teachers.

Considering all of these factors, some of the broad questions of this study focused on the positive or negative impact that the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program has on new teachers and the courses that are taught. The study sought to answer the following questions about the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program:

1. What are the perceptions of practicing graduate students currently enrolled and/or recently graduated from the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program concerning the strengths and weaknesses in both content areas of the certification?
2. What are the perceptions of practicing graduate students currently enrolled and/or recently graduated from the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program concerning their preparation to teach in an early childhood, special education, and/or inclusion setting?

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the key terms to be used are defined as follows:

- Adjunct Professor - is a “part-time professor who does not hold a permanent position at that particular academic institution” (Wikipedia Foundation, Inc., 2010, p. 5).
- Alternate Route – is “a non-traditional teacher preparation program” (N.J.A.C. 6A:9, 2009, p. 3).
- Certificate of Eligibility (CE) - is issued to alternate route candidates. It is “a credential with lifetime validity issued to persons who have completed

degree, academic study and applicable test requirements for certification.

The CE permits the applicant to seek and accept employment in positions requiring certification” (N.J.A.C. 6A:9, 2009, p. 5).

- Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS) - is issued to traditional route candidates. It is “a credential with lifetime validity issued to persons who have completed degree, academic study, applicable test requirements and traditional professional preparation programs for certification. The CEAS permits the applicant to seek and accept employment in positions requiring certification” (N.J.A.C. 6A:9, 2009, p. 5).
- Fieldwork - is “the way most qualitative researchers collect data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 82).
- Full-time Professor – is a full-time professor who holds a permanent position at a particular academic institution (Wikipedia Foundation, Inc., 2010).
- Interviews - are used to “gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how the participants interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103).
- Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> Grade (K-5) Certification – a person who is certified to teach children in kindergarten through fifth grade.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) - provides six standards for colleges and universities in early childhood programs to help prepare teachers to teach in early childhood settings (NAEYC, 2009).

- National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) - “is a national professional accrediting body for educator preparation” (N.J.A.C. 6A:9, 2009, p. 9).
- Non-random, Purposeful Sample - a type of sampling which consists of “choosing particular subjects to include in the research because they facilitate the expansion of the developing study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 73).
- Paraprofessional – is “a school aide or classroom aide who assists appropriately certified personnel with the supervision of pupil activities” (N.J.A.C. 6A:9, 2009, p. 10).
- Participatory Action Research - Bogdan & Biklen (2007) explained that a participatory action research project involves research that is done on a program or policy with the researchers and program staff collaborating on the design and process of the research. People in their program, regardless of their status, participate in the different aspects of the research effort. The purpose is to improve the program or policy (p. 221).
- Preschool Through Grade 3 (P-3) Certification – a person who is certified to teach children in preschool through third grade.
- Provisional Certificate - is “a two-year certificate issued to candidates who have met the requirements for initial employment but who have not yet met the requirements for standard certification” (N.J.A.C. 6A:9, 2009, p. 12).
- Qualitative Data - is descriptive data, which can be in the forms of "interview transcripts, fieldnotes, photographs, videotapes, personal documents, memos, and other official records” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 6).

- Quantitative Data - is statistical data that can be in the forms of a survey or questionnaire (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).
- Special Education (TSD) Certification - a person who is certified to teach children with special needs.
- Standard Certificate – is “a permanent certificate issued to a person who has met all certification requirements” (N.J.A.C. 6A:9, 2009, p. 13).
- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) - is a computer program that is used to analyze quantitative data (Cronk, 2008).
- Substitute Credential - “is intended only for persons acting temporarily in replacement of a fully certified and regularly employed classroom teacher when the supply of properly certified teachers is inadequate to staff the school” (N.J.A.C. 6A:9, 2009, p. 79).
- Traditional Route - created for individuals without a bachelor’s degree. It requires individuals to complete a state-approved teacher preparation program at a regionally accredited college or university.
- Triangulation - occurs when a researcher uses "multiple data-collection methods" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36).

The next four chapters include literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and recommendations. Chapter II consists of a review of literature that is relevant to this study. It provides an overview of the importance that being prepared to teach in today’s society helps teachers perform effectively in any type of classroom setting, how dual certification programs evolved, and provides examples of effective training and improvement strategies used to help prepare candidates to teach in multiple

settings. Chapter III contains the methodology of how the research for the study was conducted. It discusses the setting and participants involved in the study, the research methods used, and how the data were collected and analyzed. It also includes implications, challenges, and obstacles of the researcher involved in the study.

Chapter IV reports the results and discussion of the study and includes answers to the research questions. Chapter V discusses recommendations for the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program, a leadership summary of the researcher throughout the study, and implications for future research.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

Preparing teachers to teach in multiple settings is important in today's society. When teachers are given effective training and strategies, they are able to meet the needs of all of their students in the classroom. The following literature review is divided into three sections. The first heading, *The Need to Prepare Teachers in Dual Certification Programs*, provides an overview of the importance that being prepared to teach in today's society helps teachers perform effectively in any type of classroom setting. The second heading, *History of Dual Certification Programs*, explores how dual certification evolved, including the implementation and affects of different types of dual certification programs at the college level. The last heading, *Effective Training and Strategies for Dual Certification Programs*, provides examples of effective training and improvement strategies used to help prepare candidates to teach in multiple settings.

#### **The Need to Prepare Teachers in Dual Certification Programs**

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education surveyed 3,500 teachers, and four out of five felt they were unprepared to teach in a classroom setting (The George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2001). Of those teachers, more than one third did not have a degree in the subject they taught and/or did not receive enough training. The George Lucas Educational Foundation (2008) stated, "The best teacher-preparation programs focus on teaching subject-matter and provide opportunities for teachers to spend time in classrooms with an experienced mentor" (p. 1). Even though these teachers felt they were

trained in the areas of early childhood and special education, some indicated their training did not prepare them for the classroom. Many took on positions in the most challenging schools with minimal help and support.

According to a report from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, a survey found that first-year teachers felt they lacked preparation in two areas:

1. Teaching students with special needs and dealing with a culturally diverse classroom, 82% of first-year teachers felt their coursework covered teaching students with special needs, but only 47% said the training helped prepare them to teach those types of students.
2. For teaching a cultural diverse group of students, 76% felt they were taught the coursework, but only 39% said the training helped them when they were in the classroom. (Rochkind et al., 2008, p. 7)

Both of these areas are very important when teaching in the classroom. Colleges need to take some responsibility and to change their teacher preparation programs (both traditional and alternate route) in order to help prepare teachers for these types of groups in both areas of their dual certification program.

Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) did a study of New York teachers from different education programs (certified, non-certified, and transcript reviews) in New York and other states. They compared the quality of teacher preparation, beliefs and practices, and commitment to remain in teaching based on these programs. They discussed what novice teachers must know before they enter the classroom in order to teach effectively. Regardless of what teacher program candidates go through, it is

important for them to understand the basics of learning and development, curriculum, and teaching before they actually teach. Many colleges and universities offer dual certification programs differently, causing students to develop different skills during their teacher preparation coursework. Some college programs have unrelated courses that focus too much on theory with little connection to teaching practice (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Colleges need to have their candidates apply what they learn into their practice and adjust it accordingly. Candidates would then learn from their own practice and from others by analyzing student learning and applying it to their teaching. They would also be able to develop problem-solving strategies that promote student learning and success (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007).

Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) stated, “College programs that are successful provide a framework for learning how to teach where new teachers develop a vision, knowledge, and necessary tools to reflect on and analyze their teaching and development” (p. 120). Ferraro (2000) discussed reflective practice and how teachers can analyze their own teaching style to improve and become more effective in the classroom. Educational leaders give teachers the opportunity to do that through lesson plans, observations, grade level meetings, professional improvement plans, professional development, and others strategies. When teachers reflect on their own teaching and practice, their students benefit by being able to build confidence and develop a keen love for learning as they continue to grow throughout their lives and in the world.

Since classrooms today are more diverse with students from many cultures and ethnic groups, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) believes it is important to prepare teachers to meet all of the students’ needs and

educational goals in today's society (NCATE, 2008). There are six unit standards that colleges and universities must follow within their programs, including the courses taught, performance of students, and accountability. As of October 22, 2010, there are only nine universities in New Jersey that are NCATE accredited, including the urban university (NCATE, 2010). More colleges and universities in New Jersey need to be NCATE accredited in order to help teachers meet the needs of every student in their classroom.

Along with being NCATE accredited, The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provides standards for colleges and universities in early childhood programs to help prepare teachers to teach in early childhood settings. NAEYC (2009) has six standards for professional preparation and works with NCATE to review early childhood programs at colleges and universities by evaluating program reports to determine whether the program meets those standards. "If a program meets the standards and receives national recognition, and if the institution goes on to be accredited by NCATE, the program has received a nationally known mark of quality" (NAEYC, 2008, p.1).

NAEYC and NCATE also work closely with other groups, including the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) to make sure the standards balance and support each other so that all early childhood teachers are well-prepared to teach young children with and without special needs in multiple settings (Council for Exceptional Children, n.d.). The CEC includes ten narrative standards, which are used to review all special education programs at colleges and universities. "The CEC standards are also in conjunction with DEC, which includes the core knowledge and skill base for all beginning special education teachers of early childhood students"

(CEC, n.d., p. 1). Candidates must demonstrate their mastery of each standard in the programs at colleges and universities through their knowledge and skills of the CEC/DEC. (CEC, n.d.).

As mentioned previously, there are only nine universities that are NCATE accredited in New Jersey, which means only nine have met the NAEYC standards (NCATE, 2010). This also means that only nine universities are providing the necessary preparation for their candidates to teach in multiple settings and to facilitate all of their students' needs. More research needs to be conducted on why only nine universities are NCATE accredited.

### **The History of Dual Certification Programs**

In 2005-2006, dual certification programs were developed in colleges and universities to meet the needs of teachers and young children. At the urban university where the researcher is an adjunct professor, three types of dual certifications were offered, including Preschool through third grade (P-3)/Kindergarten through fifth grade (K-5), P-3/Special Education (TSD), and K-5/TSD. Due to this, colleges and universities had to develop different routes, traditional and alternate, depending on the needs of the individuals obtaining the P-3 certification. In the 2005-2006 school year, a study showed that more students were enrolled in dual certification programs than the P-3 certification (Rice & McLaughlin, 2007). Rice and McLaughlin stated there were "915 students enrolled in P-3/K-5 dual certification programs compared to only 606 students enrolled in single P-3 certification programs. There were also 200 undergraduate students and 40-50 graduate students enrolled in the P-3/TSD program" (2007, p. 3). P-3/TSD came out

in 2006, which was the reason why the numbers for that year were lower than the P-3/K-5 certification.

Since dual certification has been in existence, the roles for general and special education teachers have changed due to the diversity and needs of students in the classroom. Kerns (1996) used data from graduates at the University of New Hampshire and outside of New Hampshire to address the need for better preparation in dual certification programs. Kerns' (1996) hypothesis

Strongly supported how graduates felt competent in communicating and collaborating with others, but consultation was an area in which they felt a need for more preparation. For example, how to ask questions, provide guidance, and support one another's professional growth were some areas they needed more preparation in. (p. 312)

Kerns (1996) also mentioned how important it was for general and special education teachers to collaborate with each other when teaching together in an inclusion classroom in order to support student growth and achievement. Due to these implications, consultation is now part of the coursework at the University of New Hampshire, and many graduates today are taking on a dual certification programs in general and special education.

Being certified in a dual certification program has many benefits, yet there are some implications. A survey on dual certification was taken by individuals who worked on committees for undergraduate and graduate programs in the education departments of universities in New Jersey. "Out of 11 responses, four were chairs of the education departments, one was the associate dean of students, five were faculty, and one was a

facilitator” (Rice & McLaughlin, 2007, p. 4). The survey acknowledged that dual certification programs allowed for more effective teaching, flexibility, and a broader spectrum of being more marketable in more than one area of study. Also, teachers in dual certification programs had a better understanding of diversity and were able to adapt to the needs and issues in both areas of their study (Rice & McLaughlin, 2007).

Some implications in the survey included that dual certification programs overlapped as regarding how many credits should be taken in both areas (early childhood and elementary education; early childhood and special education; and elementary education and special education). There were inaccurate regulations in New Jersey concerning how many hours of instruction in an area of study there can be for professional preparation, which included 30 semester-hour credits. Due to this information, colleges and universities felt it was difficult to cover the material needed for dual certification programs and also prepare candidates to teach in multiple environments. They also believed that candidates should be required to spend equal amounts of time in field placements for both areas of study. Some made negative comments, which included, “dual certification programs were developed without a thoughtful and deliberate action plan; fitting all that needs to be covered within the 30 credit cap continues to be a problem; things are taught differently in P-3 and K-5” (Rice & McLaughlin, 2007, p. 7).

Findings indicate that some colleges and universities teach dual certification programs differently, causing students to develop different skills in their teacher preparation coursework (Rice & McLaughlin, 2007). Further research needs to be completed regarding how colleges and universities examine the course work and the way

classes are taught for dual certification programs. Miller and Stayton (1998) used data from 20 states with participants in public institutions of higher education to test their hypothesis on the benefits of a new blended approach to teacher preparation in early childhood and special education. They found their hypothesis to have some benefits, but also to have consistent issues and problems. Some benefits included personal and professional growth, an improved curriculum, collaborative research, and problem solving. Some issues included administrative constraints, interpersonal issues, and time. Miller and Stayton (1998) discussed how important it was for faculty to work collaboratively with each other, especially when implementing a new blended program. Further research and studies need to be done to identify effective structures and practices in a blended program.

### **Effective Training and Strategies for Dual Certification Programs**

Today's society is very diverse and therefore teachers need to obtain effective training and strategies in order to meet all of their students' needs in the classroom. Research has indicated, "How teachers relate to their students in terms of attitudes and perceptions is one of the critical factors in how students learn and can lead to students being misunderstood, mistreated, and uneducated" (White-Clark, 2005, p. 25).

White-Clark (2005) discussed effective ways to train teachers to succeed in a diverse classroom. One included providing professional development for teachers regarding how to prepare them to differentiate instruction for all of their students. Another was through the Reflection-Instruction Collaboration-Supportive (RICS). This was a "professional development model that provided teachers and school leaders with a

conceptual framework for professional development in the area of diversity and included the elements of reflection, instruction, collaboration, and a support system” (White-Clark, 2005, p. 25).

White-Clark (2005) discussed the four elements and stated that it is important for teachers to self-reflect on their own teaching; learn specific instructional strategies for student growth and achievement; collaborate with the principal, parents, students, and other teachers to establish a rapport; and be part of a support system (a mentoring program) that has been established by the principal to initiate and implement effective strategies to meet all of their students’ needs in the classroom (pp. 25-26).

This article showed that principals need to change their perceptions and act as positive role models for teachers by providing necessary guidance and support. When this occurs, “a school climate is formed that embraces diversity and encourages teachers to be more receptive to new ideas and instructional approaches which help them to meet the needs of all their culturally diverse students” (White-Clark, 2005, p. 26).

Other research discussed how NCATE and other educational groups provide effective strategies for new teachers. NCATE (2006) gave a summary of five key research findings on how they provide teacher preparation at colleges and universities.

They include:

1. Teacher preparation helps candidates develop the knowledge and skill they need in the classroom;
2. Well prepared teachers are more likely to remain in teaching;
3. Well prepared teachers produce higher student achievement;
4. Leading industrialized nations invest heavily in pre-service teacher preparation;
- and 5. NCATE makes a difference in teacher preparation. (p. 3)

These are critical NCATE findings and important in order for effective teaching and student achievement to occur.

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) include other types of standards for beginning general education and special education teachers. These standards provide an outline for what teachers need to know and be able to do when teaching students with disabilities. They include four areas: content, pedagogy, students with disabilities, and context. The four areas “provide similarities and differences in the roles, knowledge, and skills of both general and special education teachers” (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 2001, p. 7). INTASC (2001), stated “teachers must be taught effectively in order to understand each area and provide an appropriate education to students with disabilities” (p. 8).

## **Leadership**

The best practices of leadership can be identified through educational research. Stogdill (1950) stated, “Leadership may be considered as the process of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement” (p. 3). Leadership implies values which guide a person in making important decisions. A leader must have values that are life-giving to society including respect, dignity, and diversity for their followers. There are several styles of leadership, some include: transformational, emotional intelligence, behavioral, charismatic, servant, and shared.

A transformational leader recognizes the existing needs of her followers and helps her followers develop those needs to meet their fullest potential (Burns, 2003). Hernon and Rossiter (2006) discussed five categories of emotional intelligence including self-

awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The first three categories (self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation) relate to self-management, while the other two (empathy and social skills) relate to managing relationships with others. By having these emotional intelligences, a person can be an effective leader (Hernon & Rossiter, 2006).

Hersey and Blanchard (1995) described two important dimensions of behavioral leadership, initiating structure and consideration, and how a leader can carry out his or her activities. Initiating structure includes a one voice leader who directs people with a task oriented style. This type of leader lets her followers know what is expected of them by planning tasks, clarifying work roles, and asking for results. Consideration includes a leader who is people oriented and provides a warm and collaborative atmosphere. This type of leader treats his or her followers equally, is friendly and approachable, and listens to suggestions made from her followers before implementing them. Hersey and Blanchard (1995) explained that a person who is high in both of these dimensions will be an effective leader.

Nadler and Tushman (1995) stated, “Being a charismatic leader is critical during times of strategic organizational change” (p. 108). Nadler and Tushman (1995) discussed three components of charismatic leadership including envisioning, energizing, and enabling. Each is important in order for effective leadership to occur. The first component, envisioning, includes the leader creating a clear vision and setting high expectations for the future, which his or her followers believe is realistic. The followers want to succeed and take action to move the organization forward in a positive direction. The second component, energizing, occurs when the leader uses his or her “own personal

excitement and energy” directly to a large number of followers and expresses confidence in their ability to move the organization in a positive direction (Nadler & Tushman, 1995, p. 110). The last category includes a leader’s ability of enabling. The leader gives emotional assistance to his or her followers while they perform and accomplish their goals. The leader is also confident in his or her followers’ ability to perform effectively in meeting the challenges of changing the organization (Nadler & Tushman, 1995).

Greenleaf (1995) discussed the story, *Journey to the East*, and based on the story he stated, “The great leader is seen as a servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness” (p. 19). In the story, Leo was the leader, but “he was a servant first because that was what he was deep down inside” (Greenleaf, 1995, p. 19). Spears (2004) stated, “True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant - first to make sure that other people’s highest-priority needs are being served” (p. 8). Spears (2004) discussed ten characteristics of how a servant leader develops including listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building a community. He stated that a servant leader is similar to a transformational leader in that it is a “long-term approach to life and work and has the potential for creating a positive change throughout our society” (Spears, 2004, p. 8).

Stowell and Mead (2007) discussed shared leadership and how leadership is shared within teams. This type of leadership becomes necessary when a team faces a

problem or challenge. It “requires the willingness of the team to step up and use their influence when a need arises” (Stowell & Mead, 2007, p. 60).

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

Dual certification programs have been in existence in New Jersey since 2005. Studies have shown the need for better preparation in dual certification programs. Kerns (1996) used data from graduates at the University of New Hampshire and outside of New Hampshire to address the need for better preparation in dual certification programs. Findings indicated that some colleges and universities teach dual certification programs differently, causing students to develop different skills in their teacher preparation coursework (Rice & McLaughlin, 2007). Some college programs have unrelated courses that focus too much on theory with little connection to teaching practice (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). While the state of New Jersey has made some changes to the certification process, dual certification still remains predominantly the same.

The researcher understands that being a teacher in today's society requires extensive education and preparation. The researcher has been an adjunct professor for the early childhood department at an urban university in New Jersey for over six years and has witnessed various changes in the certification process, including the need to better prepare teachers for a diverse classroom. Students who receive a dual certification in Early Childhood Special Education can either teach in a regular, special education, or inclusion classroom. Consequently, the researcher strived to improve the program and

wanted to ensure that the early childhood department was providing effective training and strategies in both areas of their study. The researcher also wanted to ensure that the students were confident in their preparation to teach in multiple settings.

The purposes of this action research study was to assess an urban university's graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program and find ways to improve the program in order to facilitate growth and success for all of the students. The research design included both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, which were in the forms of a questionnaire and interviews. Other colleges' and universities' graduate programs in Early Childhood Special Education dual certification were also analyzed to determine if they were similar to the urban university and met the students' needs and standards.

During the summer of 2009, the researcher collaborated with the department chair and faculty at the urban university who were part of the graduate Early Childhood Special Education program. The researcher spoke about her concern and asked if she could assess the program to see if any changes needed to be made. Together, the researcher, department chair, and faculty developed a questionnaire (see Appendix A) and interview questions (see Appendix B), which were used to assess the current Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program to see where changes, if any, needed to take place. Permission was then sought to request names of graduate students currently enrolled in the program and students who had recently graduated from the program.

## **Research Questions**

The study sought to answer the following questions about the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program:

1. What are the perceptions of practicing graduate students currently enrolled and/or recently graduated from the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program concerning the strengths and weaknesses in both content areas of the certification?
2. What are the perceptions of practicing graduate students currently enrolled and/or recently graduated from the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program concerning their preparation to teach in an early childhood, special education, and/or inclusion setting?

## **Setting**

The urban university is located in New Jersey and offers various undergraduate and graduate programs. For the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program, there are full-time and part-time professors who teach different classes from both the Early Childhood and Special Education departments. Since the spring of 2010, the Early Childhood department consisted of one department chair, seven full-time professors, 21 adjunct professors, and 116 graduate students. In the Special Education department there was one department chair, eight full-time professors, 11 adjunct professors, and 239 graduate students.

## **Research Methods**

The objectives for this study were achieved by completing a participatory action research project. The sample design that the researcher administered was a non-random, purposeful sample. The data included both qualitative and quantitative data. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data provided important information about the Early Childhood Special Education program and found answers for both research questions. The researcher was able to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program and any concerns the students were having regarding their preparation to teach in multiple settings.

The study was comprised of six cycles, which took place from February, 2010, through December, 2010. Cycle I began in February, 2010, and ended in March, 2010. During this cycle, permission was sought to request names of graduate students enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase or those with 18 credits or more. Names of professors who taught students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> phase's classes were given to the researcher.

Cycle II began in March, 2010, and ended in April, 2010. The researcher spoke to professors who were teaching classes in phases 3 and 4 through email. Out of four professors, only one allowed the researcher to speak to her students. From that professor, 14 students participated in the researcher's study. Due to this, the researcher emailed seven students who recently graduated from the program. Most of them responded back and five took part in the study. The students who took part in the researcher's study signed a letter of consent (see Appendix C), which explained the study in more detail and how their names would be kept anonymous throughout the entire time they participated.

Cycle III occurred from April, 2010 to June, 2010. Students received a questionnaire regarding their experience, including the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and their preparation to teach in multiple settings. Each student was given time to complete the questionnaire and had to submit it by June, 2010.

Cycle IV occurred during the summer of 2010, from June, 2010 to August, 2010. The researcher conducted online interviews with each participant and followed up with a phone interview. After the study was completed, a children's book was issued to the students who participated to thank them for their time and participation in the study.

Cycle V occurred from August, 2010 to September, 2010. The researcher looked at different colleges and universities graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification programs in New Jersey and compared them to the urban university.

Cycle VI occurred during September, 2010 and December, 2010. The data that the researcher collected were compiled, analyzed, and the findings were reported in this study.

## **Participants**

As of the summer of 2009, 29 students were currently enrolled in the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. Of those students, 2 were male and 27 were female. The ethnicities of these students included 6 African American, 7 Hispanic, 13 Caucasian, and 3 unknown. Since the summer of 2009, only 7 students completed the program. This population fits the larger picture of the Early Childhood and Special Education department, both of which are very important areas in education.

Approximately 19 graduate students participated in the researcher's study. Of those students, all completed a questionnaire and were interviewed.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The quantitative data included a questionnaire (see Appendix A). The data were analyzed using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS). Frequency tables were developed based on the answers that were received from the questionnaire instrument. The computations yielded interesting and useful data regarding the type of dual certification, the strengths and weaknesses in both content areas of the dual certification, and the amount of preparation needed to teach in multiple settings.

The qualitative data included interviews (see Appendix B) and comparisons of other colleges and universities' graduate Early Childhood Special Education Dual Certification programs. The researcher conducted the interviews via Internet. Follow up interviews were conducted over the phone if there was a need for clarification or further examples. After completing the interviews, the data were analyzed into major code categories and subcategories, which were formed from the answers the researcher received from each participant. The data provided important information to determine answers for both research questions.

The researcher also looked at other colleges' and universities' graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification programs to ensure that they were similar to the urban university and met the students' needs and standards. Very few colleges and universities offer a graduate dual certification program in Early Childhood Special

Education. For those that do, there were similar yet different courses which would be meaningful to the dual certification program at the urban university.

### **Validity**

The researcher was aware of both subjectivity and bias while conducting the study in order to avoid any false outcomes and results. By using three different data collection methods, the researcher was able to see triangulation throughout the data, which further reduced subjectivity and bias. Triangulation "contributes to the trustworthiness of the data" and increases confidence in a researcher's findings (Glense, 2006, p. 36).

### **Implications, Challenges, and Obstacles**

A challenge for the researcher was getting students to participate in the study. Many worked or went to school full-time and did not have any time to take part in the study. One obstacle the researcher had included finding time to collect data and complete field work. Each participant had a different schedule and the researcher had to make sure she was available as well. The researcher overcame the obstacle by setting deadlines and making sure she was available during different times throughout the spring and summer semesters. Some of the professors and students who were unable to help the researcher collect data made comments.

Comments from Professors:

Professor #1: "The courses that I teach are online. I am not sure about how you would go about meeting them. Did you have any ideas?"

Researcher: “Thank you for responding so quickly. Would I be able to send an email to your students regarding who I am and what my study is about? I would then make further arrangements with the students who are interested in beginning part of my study.”

Professor #1: “But I am not sure how you would go about contacting them because they all log on to webct and I contact them via that portal.”

Professor #2: “I spoke to my class last night regarding your study. They are all doing their student teaching at this time. After a discussion, they decided that they did not have the time to participate in your research.”

Professor #3: “I’d be glad to help in any way that I can. I actually have only two graduate students right now who are taking the Classroom Management/Positive Behavioral Support class with me. There weren’t enough students to have a graduate section so they are sitting in on my undergraduate session on Tuesday nights from 4:30 -7:00. Do you need their contact information?” This professor never emailed the researcher the students contact information.

Comments from students:

Student #1 – “I don’t live close to the school and cannot come to meet you.”

Student #2 – “I am very busy and don’t have any time to help you.”

Student #3 – “I just got diagnosed with cancer and am unable to help you at this time.”

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results and Conclusions**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to assess an urban university's graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. A secondary purpose was find ways on how to improve the program in order to facilitate growth and success for all of the students.

During the summer of 2009, the department chair and faculty at the urban university worked with the researcher to create a questionnaire (See Appendix A) and interview questions (See Appendix B), which were used to assess the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. From April, 2010 and August, 2010, 19 students took part in the study. Each student completed a questionnaire and was interviewed. Other data were collected from August, 2010 and September, 2010, when the researcher looked at different colleges' and universities graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification programs in New Jersey and compared them to the urban university.

The qualitative and quantitative data that were collected provided important information to determine answers for both research questions. The researcher utilized the services of SPSS to analyze the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire. While reviewing the interviews, the researcher noticed similarities in the data. Based on the patterns in the data, a list of major code categories and subcategories were developed

(See Appendix D). The major categories of coding were created based on the questions the researcher used to interview the 19 students. The subcategories were created based on the answers received from the interview questions and patterns that were developed. To show how the patterns were developed, the data were analyzed for the following five categories: Advantages of the Early Childhood Special Education Program, Prior Background in Early Childhood and or Special Education, Prior Certifications, Early Childhood and Special Education Terms, and Changes for the Early Childhood Special Education Program. This analysis was based on the answers that were received from 19 interviews, which included six students who completed the early childhood special education program, four students who started the program in the spring of 2010, and nine students who have taken between 9 - 15 credits in the program.

## **Results**

**Research question #1 findings.** The first question inquired about the strengths and weaknesses in each content area of the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program.

Questions #7 and #8 in the questionnaire provided important information to determine answers for the first research question. Frequency tables were prepared for questions #7 and #8.

The frequency responses in Table 1 showed significance regarding the strengths of the Early Childhood Special Education program at the urban university. Slightly more than 84% stated it provided opportunities to possess two certifications, 78.9% stated it provided increased job opportunities, and 52.6% stated the instructors had knowledge and

background of the courses that were taught; 42.1% stated it provided increased flexibility and 36.8% stated it provided good field experience and a raise in salary, while only 26.3% stated it provided practical teaching strategies, and 21.1% stated it was grade level appropriate. Others, 5.3%, stated they became a better teacher, Special Education training was applicable in every teaching situation, and they had an understanding of the need of children with disabilities.

Table 1

*Strengths of the Graduate Early Childhood Special Education Dual Certification Program.*

Strengths	Number of Students	Percentage
Obtaining Two Certifications	16	84.2%
Increased Flexibility	8	42.1%
Increased Job Opportunities	15	78.9%
Instructor's Background of Knowledge in a Course	10	52.6%
Grade Level Appropriateness	4	21.1%
Field Experience	7	36.8%
Practical Teaching Strategies	5	26.3%
Raise in Salary	7	36.8%
Others:		
Becoming a Better Teacher	1	5.3%
Special Education Training is Applicable in Every Teaching Situation	1	5.3%
Understanding the Need of Children with Disabilities	1	5.3%

The frequency responses for question #8 (Table 2) showed significance regarding the weaknesses of the Early Childhood Special Education program at the urban university. A significant number of respondents reported some weaknesses in the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. More than 36% stated the program had repetitive course work for the dual certification, while 21.1% stated there was not enough course work for both certifications, and 15.8% stated there was too much

course work for both certifications; 10.5% stated the course work was not grade level appropriate, while 5.3% stated there was a lack of instructor's background of knowledge in a course and there was a lack of diversity in the course material; 5.3% also stated there were not enough classes to choose from each phase, there were conflicting courses, and Special Education classes were substituted for Regular and Early Childhood Education classes.

Table 2

*Weaknesses of the Graduate Early Childhood Special Education Dual Certification Program.*

Weaknesses	Number of Students	Percentage
Not Enough Course Work for Both Certifications	4	21.1%
Repetitive Course Work	7	36.8%
Too much Course Work for Both Certifications	3	15.8%
Grade Level Appropriateness	2	10.5%
Instructor's Background of Knowledge in a Course	1	5.3%
Others:		
Not Enough Classes to choose from each phase	1	5.3%
Conflict of Courses - Classes are Scheduled at the Same Time	1	5.3%
Substitution of Regular Education Courses for Special Education Courses	1	5.3%
Lack of diversity in course Material	1	5.3%

Frequency tables were also prepared for selected questions in question 9 (9A1, 9A2, 9C1, 9C3). A significant number of respondents reported “strongly agree” and “agree” in items related to the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. For question 9A1 (Table 3), almost 58% marked “strongly agree” and more than 31% marked “agree” that the classes coincided with their areas of interest. Only 5.3% marked “strongly disagree” and “disagree.” No one felt “neutral” about this statement.

Table 3

*Classes Coincided with the Students' Areas of Interest.*

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	11	57.9%
Agree	6	31.6%
Neutral	0	0%
Disagree	1	5.3%
Strongly Disagree	1	5.3%
Total	19	100%

For question 9A2 (Table 4), slightly more than 42% marked “strongly agree” and “agree” that the classes coincided with the students’ areas of need, while 10.5% marked “strongly disagree” and 5.3% marked “neutral.”

Table 4

*Classes Coincided with the Students' Areas of Need.*

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	8	42.1%
Agree	8	42.1%
Neutral	1	5.3%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	2	10.5%
Total	19	100%

For question 9C1 (Table 5), only 26.3% marked “strongly agree” and 31.6% marked “agree” and “neutral” that they were satisfied with their dual certification program, along with 10.5% marked “strongly disagree agree.”

Table 5

*Students' Satisfaction with the Dual Certification Program.*

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	26.3%
Agree	6	31.6%
Neutral	6	31.6%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	10.5%
Total	19	100%

Regarding recommending the program to someone else, question 9C3 (Table 6), 36.8% marked “strongly agree” while 26.3% marked “agree,” and 31.6% marked “neutral.” Only 5.3% marked “strongly disagree.”

Table 6

*Recommending the Dual Certification Program to Someone Else.*

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	7	36.8%
Agree	5	26.3%
Neutral	6	31.6%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	1	5.3%
Total	19	100%

Many respondents had additional comments. Some important comments included the following:

"I am just starting the program."

"I had prior knowledge about most of these aspects through my teaching experience."

"This is my first semester in this program; I have no prior teaching experiences. I

am taking some classes in phase II because there were only 3 classes in Phase I, two of which were during the same night and time. I now find myself in some classes where the other students are very advanced compared to me. There should be more classes available for each course (different nights and different times). This would be a huge help."

"The coordination of program requirements in Early Childhood and Special Education are lacking. For example, classes are scheduled at the same time."

"I have some prior knowledge with my undergraduate degree in psychology."

"Many of my responses reflect my previous work experiences."

"Some training in the current policies, procedures, and preparation about how things work "in the real world" might have been beneficial."

"While I have made comments on the lack of availability of certain special education courses that were then substituted by regular education courses, I did receive quality training in a lot of areas during this program. Overall, I felt this program gave me a good foundation in a lot of areas of regular education and special education and touched upon many different things that I am sure I will encounter as a teacher."

"I have been extremely unhappy with this program. The courses are either far too basic for me or congested with busy work providing little benefit to me. The professors were NEVER available for guidance nor ever responding to my emails."

Based on these answers, the researcher then interviewed the students and found similar strengths and weaknesses in the program. Two categories were developed based on the strengths and weaknesses of the program, including *Advantages of the Early Childhood/Special Education Program* and *Changes for the Early Childhood/Special Education Program*.

***Advantages of the Early Childhood/Special Education Program.*** The researcher asked the interviewees what made them decide to pursue an Early Childhood Special Education program. Three students said that it made them more marketable and created greater job opportunities. Five students said that they enjoy working with young children, especially children with special needs. The rest of the students said that they wanted to obtain two certifications, and that this was the only urban university that offered this program when they first started.

***Changes for the Early Childhood/Special Education Program.*** The researcher also asked the interviewees what they would change about the Early Childhood Special Education program. Nine students mentioned to have more classes offered during each semester, including the summer. Two students mentioned that there were many substitutions for Special Education that dealt with different subject areas other than Special Education and that they wanted more classes offered in Special Education. Three students wanted to have more classes offered in Psychology and in the Primary Grades, 1st through 3rd. Two wanted new classes for the program while the rest did not make any comment. Out of these students, four are being placed in phase 2 or phase 3 classes when they should be placed in phase 1 classes.

**Research question #2 findings.** To address the second research question regarding the respondents' preparation to teach in multiple settings, frequency tables were prepared for selected questions in question 9 (9A3, 9A4, 9A5, and 9C2).

For question 9C2 (Table 7), the students preparation to teach in both areas of their study, 31.6% marked "neutral," 26.3% marked "strongly agree," 15.8% marked "agree" and "strongly disagree," and 10.5% marked "disagree."

Table 7

*Students' Preparation to Teach in Both Areas of Their Study.*

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	26.3%
Agree	3	15.8%
Neutral	6	31.6%
Disagree	2	10.5%
Strongly Disagree	3	15.8%
Total	19	100%

For question 9A3 (Table 8), the professors providing effective training in both areas of their study, 52.6% marked “agree,” 31.6% marked “strongly agree,” and 10.5% marked “neutral.” Only 5.3% marked “strongly disagree.”

Table 8

*Professors Provided Effective Training in Both Areas of the Students' Study.*

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	6	31.6%
Agree	10	52.6%
Neutral	2	10.5%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	1	5.3%
Total	19	100%

For question 9A4 (Table 9), the professors providing effective teaching strategies in both areas of their study, 36.8% marked “strongly agree,” 31.6% marked “agree,” 21.1% marked “neutral,” and 5.3% marked “disagree” and “strongly disagree.”

Table 9

*Professors Provided Effective Teaching Strategies in Both Areas of the Students' Study.*

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	7	36.8%
Agree	6	31.6%
Neutral	4	21.1%
Disagree	1	5.3%
Strongly Disagree	1	5.3%
Total	19	100%

For question 9A5 (Table 10), the dual certification program is helping them grow as a teacher in both areas of their study, 42.1.% marked “strongly agree,” 36.8% marked “agree,” and 10.5% marked “neutral” and “strongly disagree.”

Table 10

*The Dual Certification has Helped the Students Grow as a Teacher in Both Areas of Their Study.*

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	8	42.1%
Agree	7	36.8%
Neutral	2	10.5%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	10.5%
Total	19	100%

Based on these answers, the researcher then interviewed the students and found more reasons why some students feel unprepared to teach in early childhood, special education, and/or inclusion. Three categories were developed based on the interviewees' answers, including *Prior Background in Early Childhood Education and or Special Education, Prior Certifications, and Early Childhood/Special Education Terms.*

***Prior Background in Early Childhood Education and or Special Education.***

When the researcher asked the interviewees if they had any prior background in Early Childhood or Special Education before beginning the dual certification program, only half of the students did. One student had an associate degree in Early Childhood and a bachelor's degree in Special Education. A few students had teaching experience in preschool, kindergarten, or first grade. Others were paraprofessionals in an Early Childhood, inclusion, or Special Education setting.

***Prior Certifications.*** When the researcher asked the students if they have had any type of teacher certification before they began this program, only four had a teaching certification and three had substitute credentials. Out of the students who had a teaching certification, two students had K-5, one student had P-3, and one student had K-12, Social Studies (Kindergarten through 12th grade, Social Studies).

***Early Childhood/Special Education Terms.*** When the researcher asked the interviewees certain terms that are currently used in early childhood and special education, many were unable to answer. The only students who understood many of the terms were the ones who recently graduated from the program. For the ones were unable to answer, they responded, "I am not sure yet. I am taking classes in other phases, but I should be in phase 1;" "I am not prepared to answer those questions;" "This is my first class and I am in phase 3. The professors are talking about these terms and I don't understand any of them."

## **Conclusion**

The data that were collected intended to answer two research questions. The first question inquired about the strengths and weaknesses of dual certification programs in both content areas of the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification. After reviewing the frequency charts, it was clear that each respondent felt there were strengths in the program. More than half felt it provided opportunities to possess two certifications, increased job opportunities, and stated that the instructors had knowledge and background of the courses that were taught. Yet less than half felt it provided increased flexibility and field experience, while only a quarter felt it provided practical teaching strategies, and less than a quarter felt it was grade level appropriate. Although there was much strength in the program, there were some weaknesses. As revealed by the data, some felt the course work was repetitive, that there was not enough course work, or there was too much course work. Others felt the coursework was not grade level appropriate, it lacked the instructor's background of knowledge in a course, there were not enough classes to choose from, and there were conflicting courses.

The results from the data indicated that certain needs might not have been met within the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. Based on the needs that might not have been met, changes need to be made in order to provide the proper amount of course work for both certifications, to not have repetitive course work, and to make the courses grade level appropriate. Both the Early Childhood and Special Education departments also need to provide enough classes for the students to choose and make sure the courses do not conflict with each other. A follow-up study may be needed to see which courses need to be eliminated or added to the program.

For selected questions in question 9, many respondents reported that they strongly agreed or agreed with the statements regarding the classes they took and their satisfaction with the program. There were some who felt neutral or disagreed with some of the statements. This indicates that more research needs to be done to ensure the classes coincide with the students' areas of interest and need. Every student needs to enjoy the program in which they are enrolled and be satisfied, especially if they are going to be teaching in an Early Childhood, Special Education, or inclusion setting.

Based on the interviews that were conducted for the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program, many of the respondents felt it provided many advantages for their future careers. Even though there were advantages to this program, many students did not have an understanding of the certain terms used in Early Childhood and Special Education and felt that changes needed to take place. Based on these data, more research needs to be done in this area.

Regarding changes that need to be made with the graduate Early Childhood Special Education program, many of the respondents mentioned that there were a lack of courses available each semester, and students starting the program were being placed into phase 3 and 4 classes. If there were more courses available during each semester and less substitution of courses, the researcher believes students would be placed in the correct phases and gain important skills needed to teach in multiple settings. It is important for students to be placed in the correct phase in order to obtain important knowledge, terminology, and background that the professors are teaching in each of the courses. If a professor is teaching a Special Education course and discussing what an IEP is, how is the student supposed to understand what that terminology means if they have had no

other prior knowledge of it? The researcher believes the Early Childhood and Special Education departments need to collaborate and create more beneficial courses for the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. Students would have more available knowledge when teaching different grades with special needs children in their school.

The second question inquired about the perceptions of being prepared to teach in multiple settings. After reviewing the frequency charts, it is clear that a significant number of respondents felt the professors provided effective training and teaching strategies in both areas of their study, that the dual certification program helped them grow as a teacher in both areas of their study, and that they are prepared to teach in multiple settings. Yet, there were some who felt neutral or disagreed with those statements. This indicates that certain needs have not been met within the Early Childhood Special Education graduate dual certification program and being prepared to teach in multiple settings.

Based on the needs that might not have been met in the program indicates changes need to be made in order for the students to be prepared to teach in multiple settings. Also, the professors need to review the classes that they teach in order to help better serve their students. It is important that all students are able to teach in multiple settings, especially if they receive a dual certification.

From the interviews that were conducted for the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program some students did not understand important terms used in Early Childhood and Special Education. Some important terms include behavioral problems, cognitive disabilities, differentiate instruction, individual needs, inclusive

setting, language disorders, learning disabilities, understanding how to do an IEP, IFSP, and positive behavioral support. The students' lack of knowledge in understanding important terms in Early Childhood and Special Education creates skepticism about the program. Is it really preparing these students for the challenges in a specialized classroom or inclusion environment?

Based on this, the researcher looked at the course substitution list. Out of the 13 courses needed to obtain a dual certification in Early Childhood Special Education, there currently are eight courses with substitutions. The researcher felt five out of the eight course substitutions are very different from each other. One course substitution included a Special Education course, Language Skills in Early Childhood, which was substituted with a Literacy course, Literacy Learning in The Early Childhood Classroom. Language skills and literacy skills are two different areas in education. The researcher feels it is important for students to develop an understanding of language and speech development, disorders, and how to improve communication in the early childhood classroom. Another Special Education course, Successful Collaboration and Inclusion in the Early Childhood Years/Universal Design, was substituted with a Regular Education course, Integrating Curriculum and Instruction: Including Diversity. The Special Education course provided students with important information on how to collaborate, co-teach, plan, and implement developmentally appropriate experiences and instructional approaches in an inclusion classroom. The Regular Education course provided students with the knowledge of how to teach diverse populations, including students with special needs in an inclusive setting. As the researcher, I feel the Regular Education course is a great course to take, but it should not be substituted for the Special Education course. The students need to learn

how to collaborate, co-teach, plan, and implement important instructional practices in the classroom. The Development of Symbol Systems, Including Strategies for Alleviating the Impact of Disabilities on Linguistic Processes is a Special Education course that was substituted with another Special Education course, Developing Communication Skills in the Atypical Child. The Development of Symbol Systems, Including Strategies for Alleviating the Impact of Disabilities on Linguistic Processes provided an understanding on the development of visual and alphabetic literacy, written and numeric symbols, and how to promote and assess those symbols in Early Childhood. Developing Communication Skills in the Atypical Child focused on language disorders associated with different impairments. Although the courses are similar, they focus on different terms needed for students who teach in an Early Childhood, Special Education, and or inclusion setting. For student teaching, Early Childhood Special Education Student Teaching Internship was substituted for Internship and Student Teaching Seminar in Early Childhood Special Education, which was substituted for the Internship Seminar. While each of the classes involved student teaching internships, Internship and Internship Seminar only deal with Early Childhood. As the researcher, I suggest it is important for students to get placed in an inclusive setting that deals with both Early Childhood and Special Education, especially if they are receiving a dual certification in Early Childhood Special Education.

Due to many course substitutions in the program, the researcher looked at other colleges' and universities' Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. Very few colleges and universities offered a graduate dual certification program in Early Childhood Special Education. One university offered similar, but different courses than

the urban university. Although many of the courses were similar, some interesting courses that were offered included methods of research, nature of reading, integrating math, science, technology in the inclusive early childhood classroom, and clinical experiences for their students in inclusive early childhood and elementary settings. As the researcher, I feel more research needs to be done in this area and changes need to be made with the substitutions of courses for the program at the urban university. This will help the students understand important terms in order to develop confidence and teach effectively in both areas of their study.

In regards to prior background and certifications in Early Childhood and or Special Education, it was interesting to hear that many did not have a teaching certification prior to this graduate program, especially a substitute credential. This is a graduate program, which means that the students have obtained a degree in either education or another field. It is important for professors in the Early Childhood department and Special Education department to understand that some of the students in this program have prior certifications and background in Early Childhood and or Special Education, while others do not. For the ones who do not, it is important for professors to teach them the proper skills, which are needed in the classroom in order to teach in multiple settings. Professors also need to inform their students about being a paraprofessional and substitute teacher so they can gain experience in different areas as they are completing their coursework. In order to become a paraprofessional, the state of New Jersey requires "two years of a study at an institution of higher education; obtain an associate (or higher) degree; or meet a rigorous standard of quality through a formal state assessment" (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2006, p. 1). According to

New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:9-6.5 (2009), students can obtain a county substitute credential if they complete a minimum of 60 semester-hour credits at an accredited college or university.

## **Chapter V**

### **Recommendations**

From the results of the study, the responses indicated that there was much strength, but also some weaknesses in the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program at the urban university. While many students felt they were prepared to teach in multiple settings, others did not.

The first recommendation is to create a pamphlet for the students who are interested in receiving a dual certification program in Early Childhood Special Education. This pamphlet would include important information about the program and how to complete it. It would also act as a guide for new and current students.

The second recommendation includes providing professional development for early childhood and special education professors. The Early Childhood professors would receive professional development in learning about different curricula being used in preschool and the primary grades. The Special Education professors would learn more practical and hands-on strategies for special education teachers who teach in an Early Childhood, Special Education, or inclusion setting.

The third recommendation would include having the Early Childhood and Special Education department collaborate with each other in order to gain a deeper understanding of the courses that are being taught in the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. This way they would obtain knowledge about each course and find different ways to teach the students instead of repetitive courses. New courses would be formed based on other colleges' and universities' Early Childhood Special Education

dual certification program, while others would be formed based on the students needs.

The fourth recommendation includes establishing partner schools for the students to observe and do their student teaching. This way, teachers who are teaching in the partner schools are aware and prepared to have students observe and teach in their classroom. Many students would have a positive experience completing their fieldwork and student teaching.

With these recommendations, students would be able to meet today's challenges and be able to teach diverse students in multiple settings. Also, more graduates students would want to pursue a graduate degree in the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program.

### **Leadership Summary**

Conducting this study has helped me, the researcher; develop into a knowledgeable leader in regards to the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. My definition of leadership is a person who has the art, passion, and motivation of influencing and directing followers to move towards a vision and achieve common objectives that will improve society as a whole. Throughout this study, I influenced and directed my followers to move towards their goals and found ways to improve the program in order to facilitate growth, preparation, and success to teach in multiple settings.

My role as an effective leader is to interact daily with my followers, motivate them, and convert their vision into action and reality. Effective leaders perform functions that require various skills and knowledge to create a vision, and coach and educate

followers to develop the same vision. Effective leaders also form strategic alliances for mutual support. They know themselves, face the challenges and choices of communicating a vision, make decisions by developing small learning communities, and encourage teamwork (Kelley, 1988). Effective leaders have the courage to take on responsibilities for their actions. They gather information and trust others' points of view before developing a plan of action. They also are open to change and respond appropriately in order for growth to continue within their organization. Lastly, effective leaders go the extra mile by continuing to motivate and encourage their followers to do their best (Kelley, 1988).

It is important for followers to become equal partners with their leaders in order to fulfill the vision that the leaders have for the organization (Wren, 1995). The role of followers is to act in a courageous way, which many did as they took part in the study. Courageous followers are committed to their school and have beliefs about what teaching and learning is all about. They assume responsibility for themselves and their actions. They are passionate and stand up for their leaders who make important decisions and take part in the decision making process. Courageous followers voice their opinions when they disagree with the leader by having the courage and honesty to speak up and admit mistakes. At the same time, they stand by their leader in times of struggle and change in order to become full participants in the change process and for transformation to occur. Lastly, courageous followers build their strengths by setting high standards of performance and continuing to learn how to update their skills and abilities in order to achieve successfully with their leader (Kelley, 1988).

Giuliani (2002) discussed six principles that have helped me reflect on my own teaching as an adjunct professor and to grow as a leader throughout this study. They include beliefs, optimism, courage, relentless preparation, teamwork, and communication. First, I know what is important to me and what I believe in. This has helped me guide my followers to their successes of becoming outstanding teachers. Second, I am an optimist. I set a positive outlook on life and have others follow me because I have hopes, dreams, and solutions to problems. Third, I have courage. I have learned how to manage my fears and pursue any challenges that involve risk. Fourth, I have relentless preparation. I am always well-prepared and have prior plans in place in order to face the unexpected, reduce risks, and prepare all over again. Fifth, I know the value of teamwork. I am able to develop a good team in order to balance everyone's strengths and weaknesses. By recognizing my own weaknesses and getting help from others, I am able to fill in any missing gaps and help my organization grow. Lastly, I have good communication skills. I communicate my vision, beliefs, optimism, courage, preparation, and teamwork with my followers in order to motivate and support them, and have them know what is expected of them.

### **Implications for Further Research**

Further research and interviews need to be conducted with professors in the Early Childhood and Special Education departments, including students who are currently enrolled in a dual certification program. One recommendation for a study would include taking a closer look at the course work involved for the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. This will ensure that the courses being taught are

grade level appropriate, not repetitive, and do not conflict with each other. Also, enough coursework will be equally taught in both areas of the dual certification program.

While some students graduated from the program, many just started. A follow-up study needs to be done when the students complete the graduate Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. This will ensure continued growth and success in the program. Doing further research and studies in the above areas would create a better Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program.

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APPENDIX A  
Survey Questionnaire

## Dual Certification Survey Questionnaire

*Instructions: The researcher is conducting a survey questionnaire to help with improving the Early Childhood Special Education dual certification program. Please complete the following questions as accurately as possible to reflect your opinions about the dual certification program. Your information will be kept strictly anonymous. Thank you for your participation in this survey.*

1. Are you male or female? *(Please check one.)*  
 Male       Female
  
2. Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic background?  
*(Please check one.)*  
 Asian       African American       Caucasian  
 Hispanic       Native American       Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. In which dual certification are you currently enrolled in? *(Please check one.)*  
 Early Childhood Education (P-3)/Special Education  
 Early Childhood Education (P-3)/Elementary Education (K-5)  
 Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Which of the following best describes your current teaching situation or position?  
*(Please check one.)*  
 Early Childhood Education (Preschool)  
 Special Education  
 Early Childhood Education (Preschool - Special Education)  
 Elementary Education (K-5)  
 Elementary Education (K-5 - Special Education)  
 None  
 Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How many years have you been in your current teaching situation or position?  
*(Please check one.)*  
 Less than 3       4 – 6       7 – 9       10 and over
  
6. How many years have you been teaching? *(Please check one.)*  
 None       Less than 3       4 – 6       7 – 9       10 and over
  
7. What do you consider to be the *strengths* of the dual certification program you are currently enrolled in? *(Please check all that apply.)*  
 Obtaining two certifications       Increased flexibility

- Increased job opportunities
- Grade level appropriateness
- Field experience
- Raise in salary
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Instructor's background of knowledge in a course
- Practical teaching strategies

8. What do you consider to be the *weaknesses* of the dual certification program you are currently enrolled in? (*Please check all that apply.*)

- Not enough course work for both certifications
- Too much course work for both certifications
- Instructor's background of knowledge in a course
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Repetitive course work
- Grade level appropriateness

9. Please circle your response to each item. Rate the aspects of dual certification programs on a 5 to 1 scale.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>A. Dual Certification:</b>					
1. The classes coincide with my areas of interest.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The classes coincide with my areas of need.	5	4	3	2	1
3. The professors provide effective training in both areas of study.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The professors provide effective teaching strategies in both areas of study.	5	4	3	2	1
5. The dual certification program is helping me grow as a teacher in both areas of my study.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>B. Early Childhood Special Education</b>					
1. I am familiar with terminology specific to early childhood: developmentally appropriate	5	4	3	2	1
2. I am familiar with regulations that govern early childhood settings.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I am familiar with typical growth and development.	5	4	3	2	1

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>B. Early Childhood Special Education (cont.)</b>					
4. I am familiar with how young children develop and learn at varying rates.	5	4	3	2	1
5. I can plan, implement, and evaluate developmentally appropriate curricula and instruction.	5	4	3	2	1
6. I know the impact of a child's abilities, needs, and characteristics on development and learning.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I understand the effects of cultural and linguistic differences on growth and development.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I know how to select and develop developmentally appropriate materials, equipment, and environments.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I know the basic terminology used in assessment.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I know how to write large group, small group, and individual lesson plans.	5	4	3	2	1
11. I am familiar with terminology specific to special education: SLP, RTI, universal design	5	4	3	2	1
12. I am familiar with the laws that govern special education practice.	5	4	3	2	1
13. I am familiar with atypical human growth and development.	5	4	3	2	1
14. I am familiar with the educational implications of characteristics of various exceptionalities.	5	4	3	2	1

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>B. Early Childhood Special Education (cont.)</b>					
15. I can modify curriculum and instruction based on knowledge of individual children.	5	4	3	2	1
16. I know the effects that exceptional condition(s) can have on an individual's life.	5	4	3	2	1
17. I am familiar with augmentative and assistive communication strategies.	5	4	3	2	1
18. I know the role of the family in the assessment process.	5	4	3	2	1
19. I know how to select and develop developmentally and functionally appropriate materials, equipment, and environments.	5	4	3	2	1
20. I am familiar with an IFSP and an IEP.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>C. Overall:</b>					
1. I am satisfied with my dual certification program.	5	4	3	2	1
2. I am prepared to teach in both areas of my study.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I would recommend this dual certification program to someone else.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>D. Additional Comments:</b>					

*Thank for your participation in this survey.*

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol Questions

### Interview Questions:

1. How many credits have you taken in the graduate early childhood special education dual certification program?
2. What made you decide to pursue this particular program?
3. Did you have any type of teacher certification before you began this program? If yes, which type?
4. What background did you have in either or both early childhood or special education prior to coming into the program?
5. Do you feel ready to teach in an inclusive early childhood classroom?
6. How do you plan to collaborate with families?
7. How do you plan to meet the individual needs of children through curriculum planning?
8. What are the characteristics of children with language disorders? Cognitive disabilities?
9. Learning disabilities?
10. Summarize planning of an individualized education program (IEP) or individualized family services plan (IFSP).
11. How do you plan for differentiated instruction?
12. How do you identify children with potential behavior problems?
13. Define positive behavioral support (PBS) and the major advantages of using PBS?
14. What would you change about the dual certification program? Why?

APPENDIX C  
Letter of Consent

# The Urban University

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I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a study entitled “An Exploratory Assessment of a Graduate Early Childhood Special Education Dual Certification Program.” This study is being conducted by the researcher, a doctoral student at Rowan University and adjunct professor in the Early Childhood Department. Her dissertation committee includes Dr. Jeff Graber (NJPSA), Dr. Mark Raivetz (Rowan University), and Dr. Martin W. Sharp (Rowan University).

I understand that the project involves surveys and interviews, and I must participate in both of them. I also understand that my responses with all documents will be anonymous and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used. The Urban University will not be identified either. The results of this study will be shared with the Early Childhood Department for possible use in assessment and program development.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

For my participation in this study, I will receive a children’s book to add to my personal library.

I am aware that if I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study I may contact Claudia Mejia, researcher, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email [claudiaiulo@aol.com](mailto:claudiaiulo@aol.com); and/or Dr. Robert Campbell, Faculty Advisor, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email [Campbell@rowan.edu](mailto:Campbell@rowan.edu).

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Signature of Participant

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Date

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Signature of Principal Investigator

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Date

## APPENDIX D

### Major Code Categories and Subcategories from Qualitative Data

## Advantages of the Early Childhood/Special Education Program

- E - Enjoy working with young children, special education
- G - Greater job opportunities
- M - More marketable
- O - Obtaining two certifications

## Prior Background in Early Childhood and or Special Education

- D - Associate Degree in Early Childhood; Bachelors Degree in Special Education
- LTS - Long-term Substitute
- S - Substitute
- T - Teacher (preschool, kindergarten, 1st grade, head teacher of preschool)
- P - Paraprofessional
- N - None

## Prior Certifications

- K - 5 - Kindergarten through fifth grade
- K - 12 (SS) - Kindergarten through twelve grade - social studies
- P-3 - Preschool through third grade
- S - Substitute
- N - None

## Early Childhood/Special Education Terms

- BP - Behavior Problems
- CD - Cognitive Disabilities
- CF - Collaborate with Families
- IN - Individual needs
- DI - Differentiate Instruction
- LD - Language Disorders
- LND - Learning Disability
- I - Inclusive setting
- IEP - Individualized Education Program
- IFSP - Individualized Family Services Plan
- PBS - Positive Behavioral Support

## Changes for the Early Childhood/Special Education Program

- C - Clarification of Program
- MCO - More Classes Offered
- MCSE - More Classes Offered in Special Education
- MCP - More Classes Offered in Psychology
- MCPG - More Classes for how to teach in the Primary Grades (1st - 3rd grade)
- NC - New Classes