

**Where**

State University of New York (SUNY), Buffalo State

Who

Dr. Lawrence Maheady, Professor and Horance Mann Endowed Chair

What

Nearly 30 years ago, while Dr. Maheady was an associate professor at SUNY Fredonia, New York State issued a mandate that every general education teacher had to be prepared to teach diverse learners, including students with disabilities, students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and students in poverty. Prior to developing a continuum of teaching opportunities, Dr. Maheady was strikingly aware of the disconnect between the backgrounds of his teacher candidates, who were primarily white females of privilege, and the backgrounds of the students whom he and his colleagues were preparing them to teach. Many schools neighboring the university were designated as “high need,” and some were composed predominantly of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. To address this problem, Dr. Maheady and his colleagues determined that it was necessary to increase their candidates’ opportunities to teach within the field. In collaboration with his colleagues Dr. Maheady developed the Responsive Educator Program.

Purpose

The primary objective of this program is to scaffold the experiences of all K–12 teacher candidates, both general education and special education, to more effectively teach students with or at risk for developing disabilities.

Description

The Responsive Educator Program includes a series of highly structured, developmentally sequenced clinical experiences that begin during candidates’ first year and continue throughout the program. Preservice candidates gradually assume more instructional responsibilities by teaching individuals, small groups, and entire classes in predominantly high-need schools.

Candidates are placed in pairs for all early field experiences. Initially, they serve as instructional assistants in classrooms and participate in a series of teacher-designated professional roles (e.g., working with individuals and small groups). They then serve as academic tutors for students with disabilities, or at risk for developing disabilities, in an afterschool tutoring program, and they eventually provide small-group instructional assistance. As they increase their knowledge, teaching skills, and confidence, the complexity of their practice-based experience is increased. Finally, candidates are placed in practicum experiences (i.e., two student teaching placements) in which they teach whole classes of learners.

Candidates are supported in practicum experiences through on-campus coursework, participation in whole-class and small-group lessons in which teacher educators model new instructional practices, and provide ongoing opportunities for candidates to role-play and practice new strategies before they implement them with students. Opportunities to work with mentor teachers, however, vary based on placements, and preparation in peer coaching methods is provided for candidates. Course instructors visit candidate placements regularly for formal observation and feedback. Faculty offer explicit recommendations for improving candidate and student performance.

Throughout the Responsive Educator Program, candidates are taught to use research-based practices and monitor student progress using formative measures. In addition, throughout their practicum experiences, candidates engage in structured activities to prompt analysis of practice. In addition to guidelines that support reflective practices, candidates are required to record daily written reflections in which they evaluate the nature and quality of their field experiences. Twice a semester, the logs are summarized by candidates and submitted to instructors for further feedback.

Impact

The Responsive Educator Program has provided classroom teachers and their students with disabilities, as well as students at risk for developing disabilities, with much needed additional support. At the same time, the program has assisted candidates in learning to teach and in improving their abilities to closely examine student learning data. In addition to reducing the burden of inservice teachers through increased support in the classroom, the extra teaching practice has had a powerful impact on candidate performance. In a 2004 study that examined the impact of involvement in the program on candidates' skill for teaching, Dr. Maheady and his colleagues found that the program had a noticeable impact on practice. Candidates who had completed the Responsive Educator Program could implement a research-based practice (i.e., classwide peer tutoring) with a high degree of fidelity throughout a semester-long experience and produce high levels of student accuracy on curriculum-specific academic outcomes.