

Chapter 10

Interdisciplinary Training for Early Childhood Special Educators and Speech Language Pathology Candidates

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ABSTRACT

This chapter informs readers of a collaborative five-year grant, project activity based communication (ABC), between the College of Education, Department of Special Education and the College of Communications, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. The purpose of this collaboration was to respond to the call for delivering high-quality preservice training to early childhood special educators and speech-language pathology candidates. A collaborative and cross-disciplinary approach was taken in the design of the instructional framework, the delivery of coursework, and the selection of professional development opportunities. The instructional framework is meant to prepare and educate pre-professionals on how to collaborate successfully while applying best practices of universal design for learning that support all preschoolers, with and without high-intensity needs in an inclusive preschool environment. This work is funded through a 325K personnel preparation development grant by the US Department of Education in the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

This chapter informs readers of a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to training early childhood special education (ECSE) teachers and preservice speech and language pathologists (SLPs) on how to

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co-support young students with high-intensity learning needs in an inclusive preschool environment. The instructional framework is aligned with the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development outlined by the Early Childhood Personnel Center and is designed to prepare and educate preprofessionals on how to successfully collaborate and best apply principles and practices of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to support preschoolers with and without disabilities. Project ABC (Activity-Based Communication) is a collaboration between the College of Education ECSE credential program and the College of Communications Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD).

The chapter defines Project ABC, provides the rationale for a cross-disciplinary approach to personnel preparation, presents the components of the instructional framework, and describes how the learning outcomes of Project ABC scholars will be measured and monitored. This work is funded through a \$325,000 personnel preparation development grant by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs.

PROJECT ABC

Project ABC is a 5-year project providing interdisciplinary training to cohorts of ECSE teacher candidates and SLP candidates. The aims of Project ABC are twofold: (a) to improve the effectiveness of early intervention, early childhood special education, and speech language pathology services and supports in bettering learning outcomes of young children with high-intensity communication needs, and (b) to increase the quality of early inclusive education for young children with high-intensity learning needs. The iterative nature of the project is designed to address the critical need to recruit and retain high-quality early educators and increase the knowledge and skills of Assistive Technology (AT)/Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) in ESCEs and SLPs, and accomplishes this by offering an interdisciplinary training program between the ECSE credential master's program and the CSD master's program (e.g., see Figure 1).

Project ABC seeks to accomplish these aims through collaborative training and instructional content. Training and seminars are designed to guide preservice professionals in the preparing, planning, and understanding of how to implement augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) across daily preschool routines to support the early language, literacy, and communication development of young children with intensive communication and learning needs.

THE NEED FOR PROJECT ABC

According to the 2017 report to Congress on the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA; U.S. Department of Education, 2017), almost half (43%) of preschoolers with disabilities had a speech or language impairment as their primary disability and 37.6% had a developmental delay (DD) as their primary disability. Given these numbers, early educators should expect to serve children who need access to aided AAC to promote their cognitive development. However, this is not always the case (Lieber et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, most preschool-aged children with DD who may require aided AAC are still educated in separate settings (Kleinert et al., 2015), where they face all the same challenges as their peers in inclusive settings yet have limited opportunity to learn language from or with same-age peers. In an

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