

Creating Opportunities and Advancement for Early Childhood Intervention Leaders

The proposed Project meets Absolute Priority 1-Preparation of Special Education, Early Intervention, and Related Services Leadership Personnel (CRDA 84.325D – **Type A Program**). The Project is designed to address documented needs for highly qualified leadership personnel with the necessary skills and knowledge related to serving young children with disabilities. Specifically **eight** (8) scholars will be trained to assume faculty leadership positions in Institutions of Higher Education (IHE). Further, the proposed Project addresses **Competitive Preference Priority 1** by including significant opportunities for scholars to conduct research and deliver professional development in two programs located within the geographic boundary of a *high-need LEA*, serving infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities.

Scholars (referred to as trainees) will enroll in a doctoral program at Kent State University (KSU) in Special Education, with an emphasis on early childhood intervention (ECI). Within the funded Project period, **all** trainees will complete the advanced degree program, resulting in the obtainment of a *doctoral degree*. Trainees will successfully complete (a) research courses designed to ensure competencies in quantitative, qualitative, and single subject methodologies as well as courses designed to prepare scholars for future faculty positions; (b) professional seminars designed to address current issues and state of the art practices in ECI; and (c) experientially-based activities designed to build competencies to fill faculty positions.

The Project is built upon a conceptual framework that incorporates state of the art methods for teaching adults (see Figure 1 for an illustration of the Project's conceptual framework). Further, key project personnel will ensure trainees develop skills needed to conduct research, to interpret scientifically-based (S-B) intervention practices, and to improve outcomes for children with disabilities, including high-need children with disabilities.

Definition of Key Terms

Throughout the proposal, the terms *early childhood* and *young children* refer to infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary-aged children with varying abilities. *Varying abilities* refers to children at-risk for or identified with disabilities. The term *high-need children* refers to infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary-aged children who are eligible for services under IDEA and living in poverty. *Early childhood intervention (ECI)* refers to a broad range of educational and therapeutic services from diverse agencies for young children and their families (e.g., public schools, hospitals, child care centers). *Trainee* refers to the scholars who will be recruited and enrolled in a course of study that will result in a doctoral degree (Ph.D.).

(a) Significance of the Project – 20 Points
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The Project addresses the *quantitative* need for increased numbers of leaders prepared at the doctoral level to fill faculty positions in higher education, as well as the *qualitative* need for faculty to be prepared to address issues related to serving high-need children with disabilities.

Quantitative Need

There is an ongoing, pervasive shortage of professionals prepared at the doctoral level capable of filling leadership positions in special education in general, and ECSE/EI in particular (Castle & Arends, 2003; Smith, Pion, & Tyler, 2004; Smith, Montrosse, Robb, Tyler, & Young, 2011; Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, 2010; Woods & Snyder, 2009). Specifically, there is a lack of recent doctoral program graduates to meet the increasing number of job openings in higher education (Smith, Pion, Tyler, & Gilmore, 2003; Wasburn-Moses & Therrien, 2008; Smith et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2011). Although a concerning supply/demand ratio remains, there were more doctoral programs, more enrollees, and more graduates of SPED doctoral programs in 2008 compared to 1999 (Smith et al., 2011). Yet despite these gains, largely the result of increased

leadership support in the form of training grants from OSEP, there are not enough candidates to fill vacant faculty positions. In ECI, the shortage is especially concerning as the number of faculty positions is expected to increase exponentially over the next several years (Smith et al., 2011). Such shortages lead to minimal faculty in the field, which results in a limited supply of properly prepared special education teachers and insufficient research to advance the field (Smith et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2011; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009).

According to Smith et al., 2011, there were just under 100 SPED doctoral programs offered in the United States in 2008. Of these, roughly 50% offered concentrations in early childhood or early intervention. Even more concerning, while all SPED doctoral programs include teacher preparation programs at the university, these schools represent just 9 % of the total of accredited teacher preparation programs. Moreover, universities that do not include SPED doctoral programs are less likely to have a concentration in ECI available to Bachelor and Masters students, with just above 33.3% offering this specialty (Smith et al., 2011, p. 16). Additionally, program directors of SPED teacher education programs that do not train doctoral level students anticipate that by 2015 they will add many more ECI programs, making such programs the 3rd highest ranked concentration offered in teacher preparation SPED programs. As such, there will be an increased demand for ECI faculty (Smith et al, 2011, p. 18). Given the shortage of ECI doctoral graduates to meet current faculty demands, it is likely that faculty without expertise or training in ECI will move into some of these positions.

These startling statistics speak strongly to the shortage of properly prepared faculty in ECI, which inevitably leads to a shortage of well-trained ECI professionals capable of providing effective intervention to young children with disabilities (Bruder, Mogro-Wilson, Stayton, Smith & Dietrich, 2009). Despite the fact that the number of children aged 3 - 5 receiving special

education has increased over the past several years, the number of teachers certified to teach young children has declined (Boe, 2006). The Center to Inform Personnel Preparation Policy and Practice in Early Intervention and Preschool Education (2004) conducted a survey and found that 40% of states reported a shortage in special educators for Part C, while 56% of states reported a shortage of special education teachers for 619 programs. Further, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), the vast majority of states and U.S. territories reported teacher shortages in special education for the 2011/2012 school year. While most states/territories have shortages in special education in general, 16 specifically identified shortages in ECI.

The shortage of properly prepared teachers is directly linked to the shortage in professionals prepared at the doctoral level (Bruder et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2011; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). Many statewide ECI education systems reported having a workforce ill-prepared to provide high quality services to young children with disabilities (Bruder et al., 2009; Center to Inform Personnel Preparation Policy and Practice in Early Intervention and Preschool Education, 2004) which again, is directly related to not having sufficient ECI training programs.

In general, when well-trained faculty are not hired, (a) pre-service students are prepared by less qualified faculty; (b) monies allotted to special education are reassigned or eliminated; (c) less training for general educators working with children with disabilities is available; and (d) the quality of training and research conducted regarding children with disabilities is diminished (Smith, Tyler, Pion, Sindelar, & Rosenberg, 2001). The insufficient number of faculty specializing in ECI is particularly serious given increases in policies and research supporting the

need for high quality early educational services, increased rigor in personnel standards, and the projected increase in demand for ECI teacher education programs (Smith et al., 2011).

Efficacy of KSU's Doctoral Training Program. The doctoral training program at KSU has been in existence since 1961 and currently has 42 doctoral students enrolled, 14 of whom are studying ECI. For the past five years, there has been an average of 27 students in the program with at least one graduating each year. Most of the SPED doctoral students attend part time and do not receive financial support. Given the part time nature in which students matriculate, it takes an average of five years to complete the program (coursework, comprehensive exams, and dissertation) and then depending upon the student they may not defend their dissertation for another year or two – often due to personal choices and circumstances as opposed to program requirements.

Specific to the ECI students, four have graduated in the past 5 years and all (100% - 4/4) are employed in ECI leadership positions for which they were trained. Appendix A contains a table with a summary of the current position of the recent ECI graduates, professional accomplishments, and how long it took them to complete the training program (coursework phase, comprehensive exam phase, and dissertation phase). Six additional ECI doctoral students have passed their comprehensive exams and are in the final dissertation phase. The average length of time to reach the dissertation phase by the six students was 2.5 years. As further evidence of the efficacy of KSU's SPED doctoral program (with emphasis on ECI faculty and student accomplishment), Appendix A also contains a table that highlights current ECI faculty and doctoral student activities and the degree to which the work addresses high need children.