Teacher Licensing Changes and Preschool Enrollment Boom Put New Emphasis on Teaching Young Children
TEACHER LICENSING CHANGES AND PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT BOOM PUT NEW EMPHASIS ON TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN

DAYTON, Ohio — In response to new Ohio teacher licensing requirements and the growing number of children in day care and preschool, the University of Dayton has launched a new early childhood education program and restructured its teacher education degrees.

The new early childhood education program will give students the credentials to teach children ages 3 through 8. The program will feature several hands-on field experiences through partnerships with the UD Children’s Center and urban Head Start programs.

Preschool and primary-grade teachers and stage managers have similar jobs, according to Shauna Adams, coordinator of early childhood education at UD.

An early childhood educator’s job is to set the stage for the interaction and learning that happens in the classroom, says Adams. “That’s a big shift in direction,” she says. Traditional elementary education programs often put the teacher on stage in front of the children.

Until this year, elementary teachers have been certified to teach kindergarten through eighth grade. The problem with this certification, according to Adams, is that first-graders and eighth-graders learn very differently. “So the way we teach first-graders versus eighth-graders must be very different.”

For example, a first-grade teacher focuses not only on the basics — reading, writing and arithmetic — but also on fine motor skills and social and physical development. “Teachers of young children must be experts in the extraordinary brain development that occurs during the early years,” Adams says. “They must understand how to orchestrate the experiences that young children need in order to fill the gaps in their understanding of the world around them.

“An eighth-grade teacher, on the other hand, is dealing with students who are going through the physical changes of puberty and who have an increased ability to understand the laws of the physical world,” Adams says. Middle school teachers must have a sound understanding of content areas such as science, social studies, language arts and math, she says.

The growing number of children who are in organized day care and preschool, coupled with new brain research tools such as the MRI and PET Scan that allow researchers to actually see brain activity as children learn, has revolutionized early childhood education.

What researchers know is that children under age eight “have to learn very actively,” Adams says. “The more they move, the more active they are, the better they learn. Play is how children learn about the world.”

Many people think that play is what children do instead of learning, Adams says.

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“However, we now know that play is very important in the cognitive, linguistic and social development of children.” For example, Adams says one way for children to understand math concepts like size and amounts is through play. “Moving their bodies through large and small places, running fast and then moving very slowly, throwing far and catching close — all of these experiences appear to develop connections in the brain which lay the foundations for math,” Adams says.

As part of the new program, aspiring early childhood education teachers will spend time learning how to play with children, work with families and support children with physical and emotional developmental problems.

The new early childhood education program is just one part of an overall revamping in the School of Education.

Beginning this fall, students entering UD will pursue degrees in early childhood, middle childhood, adolescent/young adult or intervention specialist programs of study. The early and middle school childhood majors replace the single major in elementary education, and adolescent/young adult education replaces the secondary education degree. The special education certificates have been replaced with the intervention specialist degree.

There are also some changes at the graduate level in the School of Education. Graduate students can now earn a master’s of science degree in education with a specialization in transdisciplinary early childhood education. The health and sport science department is offering a new master’s of science degree in exercise science.

The department of educational administration and the department of counselor education and human services have also revamped their programs to comply with new state licensing requirements.

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