DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 437 SP 033 328

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TITLE State Approved Alternative Certification: Are These Programs Changing the Face of Teacher Preparation?
PUB DATE 5 Aug 91
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Summer Workshop of the Association of Teacher Educators (Minot, ND, August 5, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Alternative Teacher Certification; *Change Strategies; Educational Change; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; National Surveys; Nontraditional Education; *Politics of Education; Position Papers; *Preservice Teacher Education; State School District Relationship; State Standards; Statewide Planning
IDENTIFIERS *State Role

ABSTRACT

The paper reviews a national survey of alternative teacher certification programs, comparing the data to: (1) Teacher Education Policy in the States: A 50-State Survey of Legislative and Administrative Actions (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), December 1990); and (2) Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis 1990 (Feistritzer, 1990). Data suggest state approved alternative teacher certification programs have permanence and are changing the face of teacher preparation. They have grown rapidly in numbers and variety, but no single model is the most promising. The studies suggest the pressure to create alternative programs came from outside the profession. When normal channels for change failed, people used the political arena. Many states mandated alternatives, and others worked alternatives via more traditional avenues, but the motivation was political. The political climate characterizing policy setting for alternative programs impacts all of teacher preparation. Teacher education must become a partnership between the university, school district, and department of education. Though universities and university-based teachers can choose not to respond to alternative programming, such action would further encourage the removal of teacher preparation from affiliation with higher education. (SM)

# State Approved Alternative Certification: Are these Programs Changing the Face of Teacher Preparation?



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August 5, 1991
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Support for this study was provided by the Center for Research in Educational Policy, College of Education, Memphis State University. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Center, the College, or the University. The Center for Research in Educational Policy is a Center for Excellence for the State of Tennessee.

# State Approved Alternative Certification: Are these Programs Changing the Face of Teacher Preparation?

*Those who would dismiss the alternative certification movement out of hand are naive. While criticism of professional education has a long history, the general public is becoming more supportive of such models. This is reflected in the increased willingness of politicians to advocate alternative approaches in spite of strong opposition from the universities and the organized profession (Haberman, 1986, p.iii).*

Zumwalt (1991) concluded her analysis of three alternative programs by stating, "...the term alternate route masks considerable variation. Policy discussion that focuses on the merits of the alternate route versus college-based teacher education oversimplifies the issue" (p. 92). Regarding the profession's response, she stated, "Teacher educators, school people, and policy makers have much to learn from viewing alternate route programs as a variety of context-specific experiments rather than as substitute or competitor of college based teacher education programs" (p. 92).

Haberman's prophetic warning and Zumwalt's admonition, separated by five years, provide a context for higher education based teacher educators to consider the implications of alternative certification routes. Our thesis is these programs have permanence and they are changing the face of teacher preparation.

## Context

Alternative certification programs, defined as those that do not rely heavily on completion of higher education approved teacher education programs, have experienced rapid growth in numbers and variation during the last five years. Impetus for continuation of this trend was outlined by President Bush and the nation's governors in delineating the national education goals. One strategy from the plan asked Congress to make grants available to states and districts to develop alternative certification systems for teachers and principals. The rationale given in *America 2000* (1991) was, "New college graduates and others seeking a career change into teaching or school leadership are often frustrated by certification requirements unrelated to subject area knowledge or leadership ability. This initiative will help. . . overcome these barriers" (p. 24).

However, no single model for such alternative systems has surfaced as the most promising for insuring accountability and excellence in the teaching profession. Additionally, accurate information is difficult to ascertain given multiple interpretations of terms and the rapidly changing landscape. This paper reviews results from a national survey of alternative certification programs and compares the data to other available sources. A qualitative analysis of standards

with respect to admissions and exit requirements, field experiences and course requirements is used to identify trends and practices.

## Status of Existing Alternative Programs

James and McNiece (1991) conducted a national survey of state departments of education regarding the nature and extent of alternative certification programs. Data were collected relative to criteria/guidelines for establishing alternative certification programs, regulations for monitoring such programs, motivational factors for creating alternative certification and projected impact of alternative programs on traditional programs. This information was compared with two other documents, *Teacher Education Policy in the States: A 50 State Survey of Legislative and Administrative Actions* (AACTE, December 1990) and *Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis 1990* (Feistritzer, 1990).

While reports on numbers of states with alternative certification routes differ, trends are emerging. Two factors may explain the apparent inconsistency: (1) the rapidly increasing number of states recognizing alternatives and (2) the variance in definition of terms.

### State Participation

Estimates on the number of states with alternatives other than emergency certificates range from 39 to 46 (AACTE, 1990; Feistritzer, 1990; James and McNiece, 1991). These figures contrast sharply with those available for the recent past. Roth (1986), citing an AACTE report, indicated that 15 states had such programs and that 11 states had legislation pending. Feistritzer (1990) reported that 33 states were implementing alternative routes, with 2 proposed and 13 considering. Only two states, Alaska and North Dakota, were identified by all three comparative sources (AACTE, 1990; Feistritzer, 1990; James and McNiece, 1991) as not having or considering alternative routes for certifying teachers. The trend for states to create alternatives is apparent.

### Program Variations

An analysis of alternative certification programs explains Zumwalt's statement that the rubric alternative or alternate certification masks considerable

variation. Two states, Alabama and Wisconsin, described 5th year Master's degree programs as alternative or non-traditional while other states in which such programs were known to exist did not identify this as an alternate route to initial certification. New York did not report having a non-traditional program, however, a temporary license may be awarded and renewed with continued enrollment in a school/college or department of education. With this license a candidate has an 80% teaching load and is assigned a mentor. Other states, including Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota, have similar programs which were identified by the state departments of education as alternative certification routes. AACTE (1990) reported a school based Experimental Urban Teacher Education Program as an alternative in Indiana, but this program was not described in Indiana's response to the James and McNiece survey (1991).

Other factors which complicate arriving at precise numbers include states changing regulations and/or standards with each legislative session and some states having multiple plans for allowing alternatives. For example, Oklahoma implemented an Alternative Certification PLAN in 1987, an Alternative Certification PROGRAM in 1990 and an Alternative PLACEMENT Plan in 1991. States such as California, Maine, Arizona and Tennessee allow alternative programs that are school based and operated by the state department of education or local education agency as well as programs based in institutions of higher education.

The oldest form of alternative certification may be the emergency certificate. Only five states, District of Columbia, Connecticut, Maine, North Carolina and Washington, do not permit teachers to earn certification through this route. Arkansas, Georgia and New Jersey limit emergency certificates to those enrolled in alternative programs.

Review of these variations reveals another important trend. Although many programs appear to be remodeled versions of the emergency certificates of the 1960's, programs operated by state departments of education and school districts have increased. Haberman (1986) identified three states that sanctioned school district based teacher preparation programs. Currently at least 12 states allow such programs (James and McNiece, 1991).

## Analysis of Program Standards

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the Association of Teacher Educators have both issued policy statements regarding alternative certification (AACTE, 1989; ATE, 1989). Both organizations voiced support for alternatives while stressing that fundamental differences between alternative and traditional programs should not be in the program standards, content, rigor or expected outcomes.

AACTE and ATE recommendations were used to compare alternative programs with traditional programs regarding admission standards, program approval and monitoring processes, curriculum, field experience requirements and competency assessment.

### Admission/Exit Criteria

Alternative programs overwhelmingly require a baccalaureate degree. Other admission standards are basically the same as those for traditional programs in 37 states. In almost every state there is a provision that will allow an individual with a bachelor's degree and a 2.5 cumulative GPA who passes tests of basic skills and subject specialty to qualify for entry into some type of alternative certification program. In most cases, NTE specialty area tests (or state equivalent) are used as admission requirements for alternative programs but serve as exit requirements in traditional programs. Five states, Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Maryland, have higher GPA requirements for alternative candidates; although Maryland gives a superintendent the right to waive any criterion for justifiable cause.

Many states (approximately 33%) link teacher shortages with admission. Candidates must be employed by a district verifying that no fully certified individual is available as a condition for admission.

One AACTE (1989) recommendation was that admission standards include an assessment of personal characteristics. ATE (1989) suggested this include an interview process. Only three states, Missouri, New Hampshire and Vermont, indicated a required interview. Arkansas reported that references are required; Connecticut requires an essay outlining the applicant's personal commitment to teaching and Utah conducts a background check to assess personal characteristics.

Program Approval and Monitoring

Approval and monitoring procedures for alternative programs are important processes in terms of quality control. When compared to traditional programs, James and McNiece (1991) found that over twice as many states use different criteria for program approval as those who use the same criteria. However, in terms of monitoring, half of those reporting use the same criteria and half use different criteria.

Curriculum Delivery

Curriculum delivery and locus of control for alternative programs is fairly evenly divided between higher education and local education agencies and/or state departments of education. Four states, Arizona, California, Maine, and Tennessee, allow for alternative programs that may be either higher education or local education agency based. Alternative programs in 17 states rely heavily on higher education institutions. The curriculum parallels the traditional program but is delivered in non-traditional ways.

Programs operated through state departments and or local education agencies use several delivery modes. These include institutes, workshops, academies and individualized professional development plans. Program length is usually expressed in terms of clock hours rather than academic credit units; an exception is Connecticut which offers the entire program for no credit.

AACTE (1989) recommended a curriculum that provides candidates with the knowledge and skills essential to the entry teacher as outlined in *Educating a Profession: Profile of a Beginning Teacher*. Sufficient information was not available to ascertain if this recommendation was being followed by any of the programs. Some states, Georgia, Colorado and Maryland, specify the course of study including competencies, skills and knowledge to be learned. More commonly, however, the curriculum content is not specified or is described in general categories covered by a traditional program, i.e. evaluation, classroom management, methods and techniques, and human growth and development.

Field Experience Requirements

ATE (1989) recommended that selection into an alternative certification program follow direct experiences with children/youth. The vast majority of

states allow an individual to begin teaching with no prior experience or training. Only four states, Colorado, Connecticut, Nebraska and Maine, reported a requirement that alternative program participants document prior experience with children. Eleven states require three to five years of work experience in a field related to the teaching subject but do not specify work with children/youth.

AACTE (1989) proposed a supervised internship which should be developed and supervised through cooperative school-university arrangements. ATE (1989) recommended that mentors receive special training, have a reduced teaching load, and receive extra compensation. Few programs report following any of these recommendations. Although two-thirds of the alternative programs require a one to three year internship (induction period) with the support of a mentor or support team, less than one-third plan collaboratively the content and supervision of the teaching. Less than twenty percent of the supervised internships described a gradual increase in responsibility until full time teaching is assumed and only four states, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi and New Hampshire, indicated that training for the mentors was required. Most programs may be described as a form of "on-the-job training" with varying degrees of supervision and support.

Competency Assessment

Two recommendations have been made regarding competency assessment for alternatively prepared teachers. Assessment of professional competency in the subject field and in professional studies should not be limited to paper and pencil tasks but should employ an array of sophisticated evaluation techniques (AACTE, 1989). Secondly, alternative certification candidates should be evaluated using the same criteria applied to other beginning teachers (ATE,1989). Eight states reported utilizing in-class appraisal of professional competencies with performance expectations similar to those required for beginning teachers.

## Motivation and Impetus

Motivations for creating alternative programs are many and varied. State certification directors were asked to rank order six factors, including the option to list additional reasons, that contributed to the decision to create alternative program options (James and McNiece, 1991). Reasons rated as "most important"

with the percent rating were: actual or anticipated shortage (43%), desire to attract brighter candidates (22%), desire to attract a more culturally diverse clientele (9%), desire to improve the quality of teacher education (9%), and legislative mandate (9%). The three factors that were rated second most important were: desire to attract a more culturally diverse clientele (40%), desire to attract brighter candidates (27%), and actual or anticipated teacher shortage (20%).

The impetus for changing state regulations to create more options for teacher certification can originate from many sources. James and McNiece (1991) asked state certification officers to identify from seven groups those that were most influential in their state. The responses in rank order with percent identifying that group are: state department of education (44%), state board of education (28%), legislature (25%), higher education institutions (12%), local education agencies (9%), executive branch (6%), and state wide teachers' associations (6%).

## Implications

The pressure to create alternative programs came from outside the profession, and when normal channels for effecting change failed, the political arena was used. Several states mandated alternatives through statue. In others, alternatives worked through more traditional avenues, but the motivation was certainly political. For example, the Governor of Montana stated that he hoped to work through the Board of Public Education rather than the legislature; however, the message was clear...an alternative route would be a reality. In Tennessee, the State Board of Education Advisory Council on Teacher Education developed the program following a negotiated agreement between the State Board of Education and a legislator who vowed to introduce legislation to create a program.

The political climate that characterizes policy setting for alternative programs impacts all of teacher preparation. The implications of policies, trends and programs for alternatives have several implications for higher education based programs and teacher educators. One, alternative certification programs have achieved political and societal acceptance and a state of permanence. To debate having options is spurious and divisive. Resources will be utilized more effectively if they are directed to designing and researching pathways that provide quality programs which protect the interests of clients and meet professionally

identified preparation needs of candidates. It is time to recognize the unique strengths of prospective teachers from non-traditional backgrounds and address directly the concern expressed in *America 2000*, i.e., the growing market of adults wishing to enter teaching.

Two, teacher education needs to become a true partnership involving universities and school districts who work closely with state departments of education. While universities have given lip service to this position for years, they typically occupied the power position and tended to treat school districts as the junior partner. Recent changes have strengthened the role of school districts and state departments of education. In some states, the university's role in alternative certification is by invitation rather than by fiat This change requires universities as institutions and professors as individuals to rethink their roles in teacher preparation. Universities must identify the unique contributions that they can make to the preparation of beginning teachers and how these roles fit into a partnership structure. Moreover, universities need to rethink how true partnerships with schools are to work. These partnerships are built on trust, joint commitment, shared responsibility, and mutuality of needs, contributions and benefits.

Perhaps one of the most important outcomes that may result from recent changes is that all stakeholders in the teacher preparation process will realize more fully the interdependent nature of the task. Collectively, the opportunity exists to simultaneously expand the knowledge base of what new teachers ought to be able to do, research the theoretical bases undergirding teacher preparation and development, and move teaching closer to a true profession.

Third, universities and or university based teacher educators can choose not to respond. The most probable outcome of this position would further encourage and expedite the removal of teacher preparation from affiliation with higher education. This loss of interface would undermine the small gains made in th. knowledge base by contributing to the belief that fitness to teach is defined by specialized study of subject and craft knowledge in the areas commonly referred to as professional education. The perception that teaching is an open access occupation would become more deeply ingrained in the minds of those who have the political power to influence educational policy and practice.

## Conclusion

The temptation is great to ignore changes that are occurring in routes to teacher certification. After all, higher education has occupied a privileged position...we have designed and delivered the most acceptable and sanctioned of the certification programs. However, the terrain has changed.

We would do well to follow the advice of Zumwalt (1991). She suggested, "...it is up to us as professionals to make the most of these experiments in teacher education - to use what we can from these experiences and to help shape future attempts to strengthen and diversify the teaching pool" (p. 92). We need to be guided by a vision of teacher education. One vision of a desirable future is found in *Restructuring the Education of Teachers* (ATE, 1991). This vision sees the preparation of teachers as a highly diversified endeavor that includes colleges and universities, school districts and state departments working together. This vision of a better future also includes the belief that teacher educators can be a factor. "It is time," the report said, " for those within teacher education to establish priorities for improving the education of teachers" (p. 5). One way those within can affect change is to acknowledge where we are as a profession, and design programs that link understanding of the knowledge bases with expected and demonstrated practice. The ability to connect these two worlds will help raise teacher education to a status where educators can influence policy and practices that govern preparation. We need to unwed ourselves from outdated constructs that diminish our creativity in order to envision the potential inherent in evolving policies and practices. The emergence of alternatives should provide us with new lenses for viewing the preparation of teachers.

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