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ABSTRACT

This paper notes that the demand for qualified special education personnel, the problem of emergency certification, and other pressures have led to a growing interest in alternative routes to teacher certification. The school reform movement has intensified efforts to professionalize teacher education and to improve the quality of teacher preparation and student performance. Many states reformed their teacher education, licensing, and compensation processes through legislative enactments during the 1980's. Several possible solutions to these certification issues are proposed. Solutions include narrowing the disparities in different states' special education terminology, philosophical bases, and training practices; developing interstate agreements; and assessing alternative certification programs. The paper concludes that there appears to be a mismatch between the needs of special education consumers and the trainees produced, which relates not only to trainee competencies and understanding, but also to the positions for which they are being prepared. Making necessary changes in training philosophy, resources, and quality concerns requires a highly collaborative effort among state education agencies, local education agencies, and institutions of higher education to develop state certification to meet the challenges. (19 references) (JDD)

State Certification

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Defining the Issue

Certification for special education and related service personnel is in a state of flux (Smith-Davis, 1989). Policies and procedures for special education certification have recently become heated topics, with debate being fueled by special eduction personnel shortages and school reform movements.

The magnitude of the special education personnel shortage is perpetuated by an increase in the number of students enrolled in preservice training programs and an increase in attrition in the field. Approximately 26,798 special education teachers were needed as of October 1, 1988 (Office of Special Education programs, 1989). Because of unique geographical, cultural, economic and social characteristics, the impact of the special education personnel shortage appears to be most severe in rural and urban school districts. These trends are particularly troublesome in light of projected increases in demand for new teachers (e.g., Part H teachers and teachers for children with emotional/behavioral problems) caused by rising student enrollment (e.g., young children age 3-5 and minority students) and anticipated increases in teacher retirements (Darling-Hammond, 1988).

Because of the persistent teacher shortage in special education, virtually all states had provisions for temporary or emergency certification before 1983 (Darling Hammond,1988). In several states, almost 40% of special education teachers in schools are not appropriately certified in special education. It is conceivable that any one student with emotional/behavioral problems or other handicapping conditions may go through his/her

entire elementary school experience without being taught by a certified special education teacher. The percentage of personnel without appropriate certification in many states has reached an intolerable level. The demand for qualified personnel, the problem of emergency certification, and other pressures have led to a growing interest in alternative routes to teacher certification. Approximately 23 states have adopted alternative certification to curb the shortage in the areas of math, science, and special education. In addition, alternative certification has been proposed as an effective means for minority recruitment and retention (Baird, 1990). Although there is some evidence that general education personnel are able to produce impressive student outcomes (Feistritzer, 1989; Graham, 1989; McKibbin, 1988; Smith-Davis, 1989), a concern for "safe to practice" in special education is widely acknowledged among special education teacher trainers. Further suggestions are that safeguard procedures be developed by the special education profession prior to implementation of alternative certification programs. Unfortunately, if teacher shortages continue to grow, the pressure on institutions of higher education (IHEs) to produce qualified personnel will be even greater. Thus, it is no longer possible to ignore this problem.

The school reform movement has intensified efforts to professionalize teacher education and to improve the quality of teacher preparation and student performance. Most institutions of higher education engaged in special education personnel preparation have been involved in the NCATE/CEC accreditation process as a means of adhering to a "profession". Thus, the Standards for the Preparation of Special Education Personnel (Government Relations and Professional Advocacy, 1987) must be addressed as a precondition to NCATE accreditation (Wade, 1989). In addition, professional groups, such as the Holmes Group, propose an increase in educational requirements for future teachers as part of their school reform recommendations, although a concern for the feasibility of such a proposal has been raised in light of teacher shortages. In a related situation, the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) recently adopted new licensing standards which require graduate level training. This change has resulted in some public school speech and language personnel no longer being eligible for licensing (McLaughlin, Smith-Davis, & Burke, 1986).

During the 1980's, many states reformed their teacher education, licensing, and compensation processes through legislative enactments (Darling-Hammond, 1988). In their recent study, McLaughlin and associates (1986) report that of 57 jurisdictions represented, 37 (65%) have made some changes in their policies governing special education certification or have such changes pending before their boards of education or legislatures. Many states have taken steps to improve the quality of education through more stringent teacher licensing. Stern (1988) reported in 1987 that 45 states had enacted competency testing programs as part of the process of initially certifying

teachers, and 31 states required an examination in order to be admitted to a teacher education program. However, Darling-Hammond (1988) argues "If we can fix teaching by developing better regulations, there is no need to produce better educated teachers" (p.5). According to Smith-Davis (1989), "This development underscores the theme of interrelationships between issues of quality of services on quantity of personnel in education" (p.9). In other words, special education as a profession has been caught in a Catch-22 of its own making. While we strive for professionalizing special education, we must face reality -- the demand for qualified teachers to fill classroom.

Alternative Solutions to the Problems of State Certification

The following section of this paper outlines several possible solutions to the issues surrounding state certification. Moreover, we discuss strategies for overcoming barriers in implementing these solutions. Solutions include narrowing the disparities in terminology, developing interstate agreements, and assessing alternative certification programs.

Narrow disparities in terminology, philosophy, and training practice:

No other disciplines in education are as conceptually and operationally confused as special education. A wide disparity in special education terminology, philosophical base, and training practice has created unnecessary bewilderment, not only for our own colleagues but for the general public. Evidence of inconsistency in title, standards, and requirements for special education can be easily found among states. The findings of a national certification study (i.e., Governmental Relations and Professional Advocacy, 1987) further substantiate this phenomenon:

1. From the manuals available, 181 different titles for teaching positions were listed.

2. States had as few as four and as many as fifteen different certification titles for teachers.

3. Twenty states list training requirements in terms of a number of credit hours while others use competencies/courses.

4. Eighteen states require dual certification for teaching children with special needs, the remainder require special education certification only.

5. Eight states require a master's degree or 5th year training for initial certification, others require only a bachelor's degree. (Governmental Relations and Professional Advocacy, 1987, p. 1-3).

If we are serious about professionalizing special education, we should "assume collective responsibility for the definition, transmittal, and enforcement of professional standards of practice and ethics" (Darling-Hammond, 1988, pp.8-9). Some suggest that it is necessary to redefine the certification categories for special education teachers and related personnel. Possible questions to be asked include the following: Can a new category of "motor skill specialist" be created to encompass occupational therapy and physical therapy, which are currently two separate categories? Should certification across related service categories be based on personnel functions and commonality of services rather than numerous discrete certification categories? Is dual certification better? Can special education attract students to the profession if dual certification is required? Can a unified terminology, standards, and training practice be developed and accepted?

Interstate certification agreements or reciprocity:

The purpose of interstate certification agreements is to provide for a simple and workable system under which school professionals educated or experienced in one state can have their qualifications recognized in many states without red tape or delay... Participation in interstate certification agreements can increase the availability of educational manpower (Baird,1989). Approximately 35 states have interstate certification agreements, but they may or may not be able to recognize special education certification from other states because of variations in certification requirements for special education teachers. Gabrys (1989) notes that many variations occur in certification terminology and policy across the field of special education and that states have as few as four and as many as fifteen different certification titles for teachers (Governmental Relations and Professional Advocacy, 1987). Gabrys (1989) further illustrates: "a certificate in mental impairment may refer to instruction of mildly retarded students exclusively, while, in another state, a certification in mental retardation may cover instruction of mildly, moderately, and severely retarded students". (p.5)

Variations from state to state in training standards makes reciprocity difficult. We should ask ourselves whether children with autism in California are significantly different from children with autism in New York? Are the educational needs for children with learning problems in Connecticut much different from children with learning problems in Colorado? Are teacher competencies for serving these two types of children much different in Ohio and Kentucky? If answers to these three questions are negative, state regulations should support, rather than impede, the distribution of quality services to children with special needs. The differences, should they exist, may not be great enough to deny initial licensing of a teacher certified in another state (Gabrys, 1989). Recent data from a National Rural Teacher Certification Study reveal that 80 percent of survey subjects support certification reciprocity between all

states when applicants apply for rural teaching positions (NRTC, 1987).

Most special education personnel preparation programs have been involved in the NCATE/CEC professional accreditation process. Because of this common link, an obvious question is whether NCATE/CEC or NASKTEC/CEC standards should be utilized to facilitate reciprocity in special education? It is recognized that Standards for the Preparation of Special Education Personnel (Governmental Relations and Professional Advocacy, 1983) may need to be revised in order to address issues such as generic vs. content specific, content vs. functional curriculum, and age and grade level of students. It is also understood that facilitating the employment of qualified special personnel without reference to their state origin would increase resources and offset shortages in some degree. Hence, the aforementioned options appear to have the potential of increasing the supply of special education teachers.

Alternative certification programs

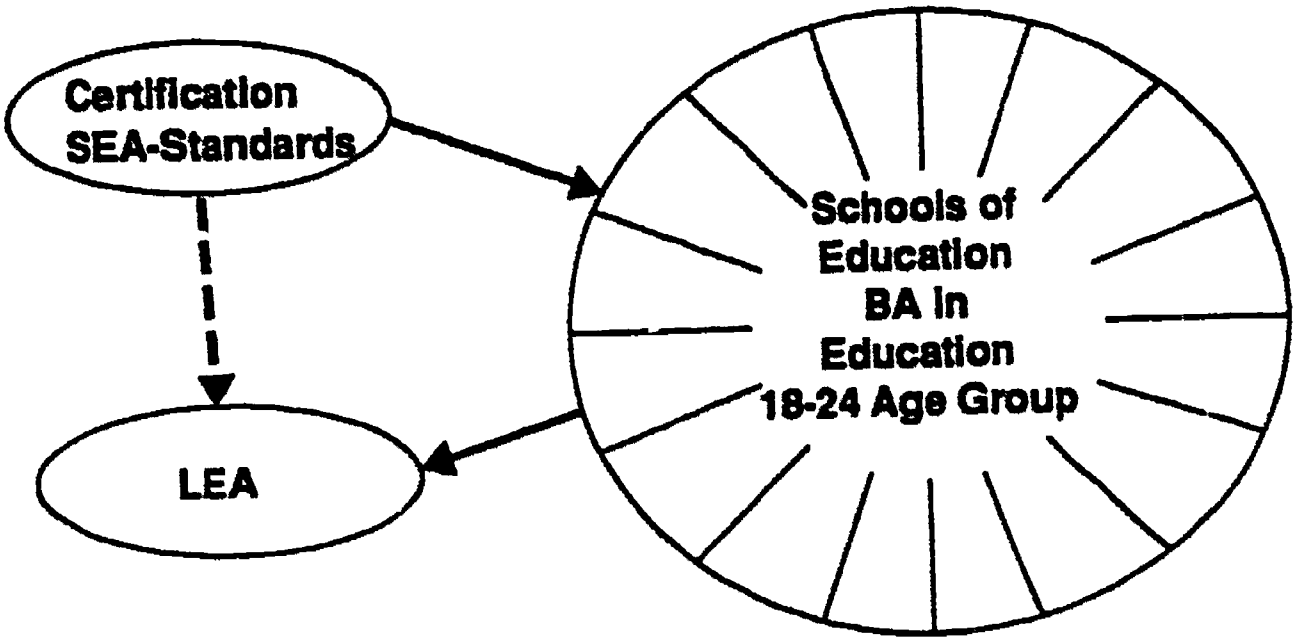
Non-traditional personnel preparation has gained attention because of acute personnel shortages and problems associated with emergency certification. The Association of Teacher Educators has issued "guidelines for alternative certification programs to try to insure that college graduates who become teachers without professional training meet minimum standards" (Commission of Alternative Certification, 1989). National data also indicate that 43 states allow emergency certification to offset shortages of traditionally prepared teachers, and 23 states offer alternative routes to certifications as a means of attracting individuals who would not or could not return to school for traditional teacher preparation (Baird, 1990).

Alternative teacher certification can be defined as any significant departure from traditional IHE teacher education options (Darling-Hammond, Hudson, & Kirby, 1989). Smith-Davis (1989) describes alternative programming as major or minor modifications in the route to teacher certification. In alternative programming, there is a shift of major training responsibility from institutions of higher education to local education associations. Baird (1989) compares and contrasts traditional certification and alternative certification in his diagram shown in Figure 1.

Baird (1989) recommended that alternative programs contain the following elements:

1. Open competition. Alternative programs should not be based only on personnel shortage. Rather, they permit alternative candidates to compete for positions.

Traditional Certification



Alternative Certification

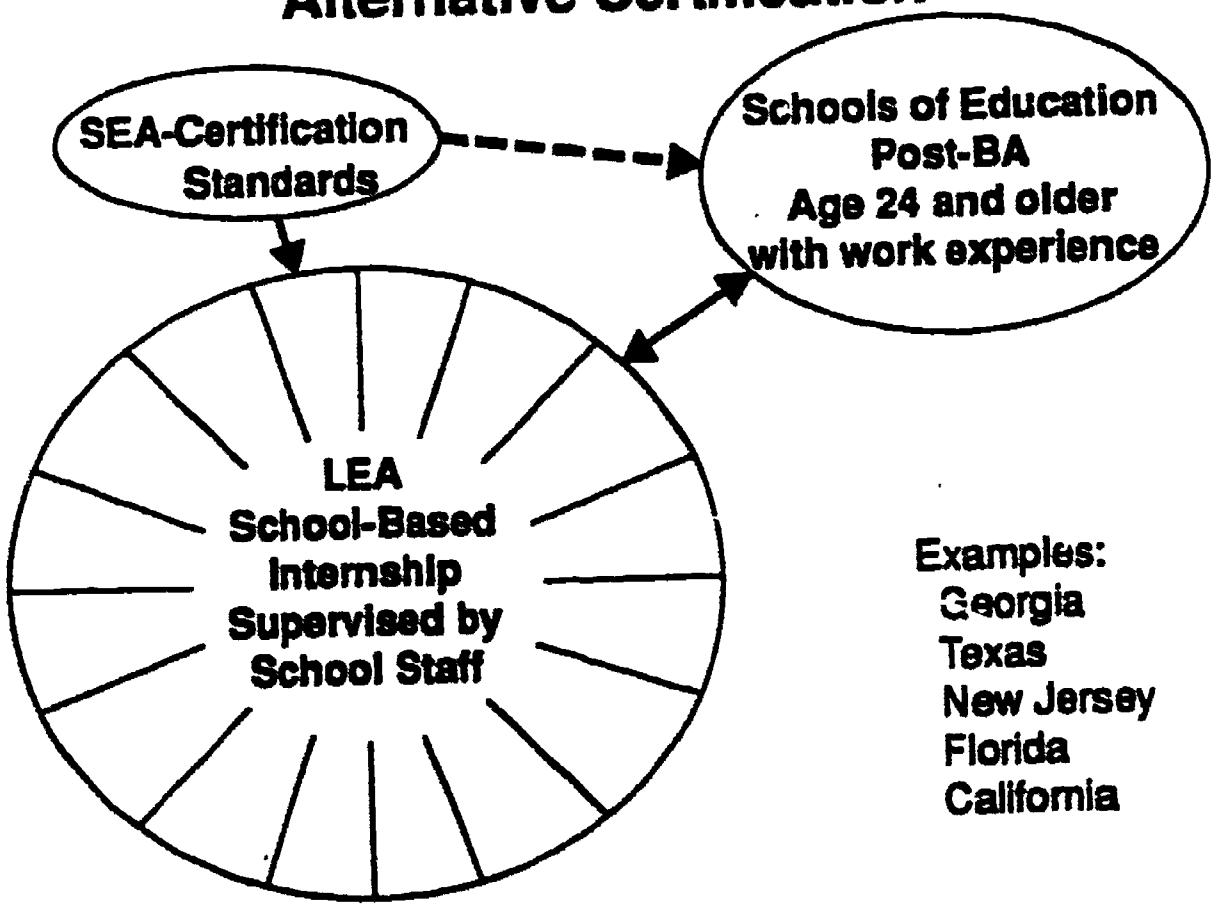


Figure 1. Comparison of Traditional and Alternative Certifications
From: Baird, A. (1989). Alternative routes to certification: A strategy for increasing the quality and quantity of teachers (unpublished paper). Used by permission of author.

2. Teacher entry requirements. Entry criteria must be met before candidate can be employed.

3. School district support. The alternative program should be a cooperative effort of local teachers, administrators, and higher education, with significant support from the district supervisory team.

4. Formal training. Course work in conjunction with internships should be coherent, intensive, and specifically designed for the target population of applicants.

5. Phase-out of emergency certification. Alternative certification would ease the shortage of human resources and eventually end the need to hire unqualified personnel (p.5).

Although the practice of alternative certification is more common in subject areas such as mathematics, foreign language, vocational education, science, and nursing, there are a few pilot programs in special education. The Houston Independent School District has recently implemented an alternative special education certification program in collaboration with the University, in which 24 individuals are currently placed in special education classrooms for children with severe behavioral/ autistic problems through an alternative certification program (Stafford, 1990). Furthermore, Delaware included special education teachers and physical therapists in its targeted positions for alternative certification in 1988-1989. In spite of resistance, alternative certification has gained ground in the field and deserves consideration. Smith-Davis (1989) urged that special educators become more cognizant of and involved in the issue of alternative certification. In 1988, McKibbin alerted us:

> What is new about recent forms of alternative certification is the potential role or, more correctly, the absence of a role for institutions of higher education... in the professional preparation portion (foundations, pedagogy, and practicum) of teacher eduction. In some states...the participation of universities is now optional. (p.82)

Because of widespread variations in teacher certification and training practice (Chapey, Pyszowski, & Trimarco, 1985), multiple philosophies (Smith-Davis, 1989), and a lack of identifiable "subject areas" in special education, the adoption of alternative certification programming in special education may be very difficult in some areas of special education personnel training. However, a concerted effort should be made to examine the feasibility of alternative certification programming for certain areas of personnel in special education and related services. For example, a school nurse or community health care

specialist may be permitted to apply for a position to provide educational services to children with complex medical needs through an alternative certification route. On the other hand, teachers of children with visual impairments may be most effectively educated by attending traditional teacher certification programs. Examples mentioned in this section may be treated as stimulants for further thought. New ideas and different ways of thinking would obviously provide better perspectives on this issue.

Implications for Special Education

State special education certification is a complex issue as well as a dynamic and on-going process. The minimum requirements for special education personnel preparation programs in IHEs are largely dictated by state certification requirements. However, state certification is based on state board of education policies, rather than on instructional realities and the quality concerns to which most IHEs adhere. In some instances, this incompatibility creates a "mismatch" situation. McLaughlin, Valdivieso, Spence, and Fuller (1988) illustrate that teacher preparation in special education may not be responding to the needs of the job market. Thus, there appears to be a mismatch between the needs of consumers and the trainees produced which relates not only to trainees competencies and understanding, but also to the positions for which they are being prepared. Reflecting and/or leading changes in training philosophy, resources, and quality concerns in the field requires a highly collaborative effort among SEA, LEAs, and IHEs to develop state certification to meet the challenges and issues identified in this paper.

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