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The search for an alternate route to certify teachers has generated ideological debates revolving around educational quality. Supporters of traditional teacher certification argue

that to improve the quality of education it is imperative to ensure that both professional knowledge and subject-matter competency are grounded in a solid foundation of pedagogical training (Roth, 1986; Shulman, 1986, 1987; Watts, 1986; Kennedy, 1990).

Supporters of alternative certification maintain that talented candidates with subject-matter competency can improve educational quality by the application of in-depth subject-matter knowledge to teaching, without necessarily going through the traditional route (Lutz & Hutton, 1989). Beyond these two views, Zumwalt (1991) suggests that alternative certification programs are context-specific experiments designed to meet policy goals, such as attracting talented career changers or filling teacher shortages, but are not necessarily substitutes or competitors of traditional preparation. This Digest reviews alternative certification on the basis of educational quality and the need to fill teacher shortages.

DEFINITIONS

In most professions, competency requirements are established by a governing body to ensure that individuals meet minimum standards before they are allowed to practice. Over the last decade, there have been a growing number of policy changes in educational reform efforts and these changes have affected teacher certification requirements nationwide (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988). In the traditional route, the minimum competency evaluation for initial certification is contingent upon completion of a 4-year college degree program, comprised of academic and professional curricula, and the demonstration of competencies in subject-matter areas through performance on written examinations, as required by each state or school district (AACTE, 1991). To ensure that these requirements are met, national, state, and local regulatory agencies and accreditation bodies implement licensure and certification regulations as a means of educational quality control (AACTE, 1991; Wise, 1991).

The alternative certification process includes holding a bachelors degree in the subject to be taught; achieving a passing score on a certification test; undergoing brief, intensive teacher training; and completing a supervised teaching internship, after which certification is recommended by the employing school district. It generally is a process designed to certify candidates who have subject-matter competencies, without going through formal teacher preparation. Alternative certification programs are being experimented with in 39 states, with the general goals of attracting talented people and career changers to the teaching profession and averting teacher shortages where they exist. Feistritzer and Chester (1991) identified about 91 alternative routes to certification with varying programmatic characteristics.

CONCERNS AND ADVANTAGES

The relationship between teacher knowledge and instructional practice has been examined by several studies (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987; Grossman, 1987;

Carlson, 1990). Conclusions indicate that teachers with more explicit and organized knowledge tend to provide instruction that has conceptual connections, and appropriate and varied representations for active and meaningful student discussion, than do teachers with limited knowledge. Stein, Baxter, and Leinhardt (1990) also found that poorly organized teacher knowledge often leads to less effective instruction. Shulman (1986, 1987) and McDiarmid and Wilson (1991) concluded, in their separate studies, that subject-matter competence alone is inadequate for instruction because teaching requires the transformation of knowledge content into representations that enhance students' understanding and learning.

Therefore, alternatively certified teachers may lack adequate pedagogical skills, which are normally acquired from formal teacher training--skills that are relevant to effective teaching (McDiarmid & Wilson, 1991). Because teachers are certified from competency in subject-matter area, the knowledge base is weak and narrowly focused to the extent that it could limit the learning horizon of the students, and adversely affect the quality of the students' overall educational experiences (Ball & Wilson, 1990; Schram, Feiman-Nemser, & Ball, 1990; Kennedy, 1991). Alternative certification has been perceived by some as an attempt to undermine the credibility, as well as the professionalization, of teaching (Zumwalt, 1991).

However, alternative certification programs do attract talented and experienced individuals to the teaching profession, especially in critically needed areas of subject matter where shortages exist (Lutz & Hutton, 1989; Shulman, 1992). Feistritzer and Chester (1991) indicate that more than 200,000 teachers have been licensed through alternative certification programs between 1985 and 1990. This represents an average growth rate of 20% or 4,000 additional teachers per year. Alternative certification encourages diversity in the classroom, which encourages role modeling and promotes learning by drawing relevant experiences from the children's backgrounds to enhance their cognitive development (Buechler, 1992). Alternative certification represents an expansion of roles played by the states and school districts in the decision-making process that affects the quality of education students receive (Natriello, 1992).

EVALUATION RESULTS

The measure of alternative certification program effectiveness depends on the quality of teachers and of students taught by these teachers. While the body of literature in alternative certification is descriptive of programs, there is little substance in critical evaluation. Although educators and measurement experts do not agree on universal effective measures of teacher ability and the quality of student learning, performance on standardized tests (NTE for teachers and SAT/ACT for students) is most widely used. Research comparing the effectiveness of traditional and alternative certification teachers has rather mixed results. Lutz and Hutton (1989) evaluated the Dallas Independent School District's alternative certification program and found that alternative certificants scored high or higher on standard measures of teaching ability/performance and were rated high or higher by principals/mentors than were traditionally prepared

teachers. Schram, Feiman-Nemser, and Ball (1990) did not find any significant difference between the two groups. Ball and Wilson (1990) found that subject-matter knowledge of new teachers, whether certified through an alternative or traditional route, was inadequate for effective instruction. Goebel, Ronacher, and Sanchez (1989) found that students taught by teachers prepared in an alternative certification program in Houston achieved as well as those students taught by traditionally prepared teachers.

CONCLUSION

Alternative teacher certification programs vary by state and may be designed to achieve different goals and objectives. Some evaluative studies that compare traditional and alternative certification routes have yielded inconclusive results, which can have far-reaching policy implications for effective teaching and the quality of education. If subject-matter competency combined with pedagogical training is the determinant of effective instruction, then the traditional certification route is the most effective policy to assure educational quality. However, if subject-matter competency without pedagogical training is equally determinant of effective instruction, then alternative certification is equally a viable policy. The question of whether those traditionally trained or those alternatively certified are the most qualified to teach may remain unanswered for several years to come.

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