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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the efforts of the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University, Virginia, to deal with the teacher shortage crisis by partnering with surrounding school divisions to help new teachers with provisional licenses meet the daily challenge of teaching while fulfilling their state licensure requirements. The Teacher Education Licensure Fulfillment (TELF) initiative helps avoid the sink or swim problem of alternatively certified teachers by providing proper support from teacher educators who effectively guide the process of upgrading provisional licenses and make mentoring arrangements among colleagues in the schools. The connection of theory, content knowledge, and practice, supported by a strong base of reflection and self-inquiry, provides essential tools for success in the first months of teaching. Some of TELF's highlights include: state-approved professional studies courses that fulfill licensure requirements; help preparing for the Praxis I exam; commitment of regular, full-time graduate school faculty to teach and direct TELF; and guidance on course choices and licensure procedures to support and coordinate with state and local school divisions. Lessons learned regarding marketing the program and teacher retention are discussed. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

AACTE 2001 Conference
Conference Theme: Caring, Competent Educators:
A Common Goal, A Shared Responsibility

The Teacher Education Licensure Fulfillment (TELF) Initiative:
A Partnership Venture for Alternative Licensure

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**A Paper in support of Strand IV: Shared Responsibility for Recruiting and
Retaining Caring and Competent Teachers with a Focus on Provisional Licensure
Challenges and Needs**

2001 AACTE Annual Meeting, March 1 - 4, Dallas, TX

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We propose an audacious goal . . . By the year 2006, America will provide every student with what should be his or her educational birthright: access to competent, caring and qualified teaching.

National Commission of Teaching and America's Future, 1996

Introduction

The teacher shortage in our country has become a serious problem for school districts nationwide. How are universities and colleges with teacher education programs helping to meet this critical need? Take a look at one initiative undertaken at a large, multicultural university in a suburban setting outside the nation's capital to get an idea of how it is working in a unique partnership with surrounding school divisions to help new teachers with provisional licenses meet the daily challenge of teaching, while fulfilling their state licensure requirements.

The popular press touts our teacher shortage dilemma--and rightly personalizes issues about teacher quality to get our attention. "Who Will Teach Our Kids?" shouts the Newsweek

(Kantrowitz and Wingert) cover story headline for October 2, 2000, when “half of all teachers will retire by 2010” and already districts find “there’s just no substitute” available to relieve an overburdened corps of teachers trying to cope with rising challenges. Washington Post headlines warn no less ominously: “Districts Scramble to Hire Teachers” (Trejos, July 30, 2000) and “Recruiting Teachers an ‘Iffy’ Proposition” (Wax, August 6, 2000). Such pressing recruitment issues force us to revisit questions of quality and diversity within the teaching profession. Should all our teachers come from state-approved university teacher education programs? Can they? Should we encourage more career switchers, as well as more first-career teacher candidates, to enter university teacher education programs? Should we provide fast-track alternative licensure options, especially for career switchers, so that we can simultaneously address issues of staffing and diversity? If we use alternative licensure options, are we sacrificing quality to expediency? Can alternative licensure programs provide teachers with enough skills to swim successfully around the rapids of their first school year without drowning in paperwork and classroom management crises?

Background

In response to the great need for teachers in critical shortage areas, many school divisions around our nation have been obligated to hire teachers who have not had the benefit of completing a teacher education program. Many school districts are behaving as if there is no choice except to tap the alternative licensure route in order to staff classrooms, whatever questions about applicant quality might haunt them. In 1993-94 [the most recent year for which statistics are available, though new data are currently being analyzed], 67.4% of the nation’s school districts had provisions for hiring teachers under “emergency or temporary state

certification”, and 16.3% of newly hired teachers (excluding teacher transfers) were teaching with “less than full” licenses. (National Center for Educational Statistics, reproduced in National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, Appendix B, Table 1) This means, of course, that in such districts some teachers may be hired without full licensure and that those teachers may be at any stage of attempted completion of requirements--from not having begun to lacking only one element (a course, test, student teaching/internship, etc.) for completion. Therefore, tapping this alternative licensure source (what National Center for Educational Statistics calls “emergency or temporary state certification”) will yield teachers of widely varied backgrounds and experiences. Such teachers could have taught previously in another state with a license to teach at the same academic level for which they are currently making application, or they could have taught previously at a different academic level, or they could have had no previous teaching experience--with or without the completion of professional courses. The variability of backgrounds is great.

In our state, as well as in other areas around the country, several pilot programs are being created which will offer prospective teachers a quicker path to licensure than more traditional programs, but the Graduate School of Education at our university holds firmly to the literature on research-based findings in the field and to its commitment to quality teacher preparation. As a well established teacher education and research institution with long-standing partnerships with its nearby school divisions, the Graduate School of Education at this large suburban university is charged to prepare teachers for today’s classrooms. We believe that in both our alternative licensure initiative and our state-approved licensure programs, our primary objective is to bring together theory and practice to best equip individuals with the tools they need to teach our students and to meet the challenges of the classrooms of today and into the 21st century. Studies

discover again and again that teacher expertise is one of the most important factors in determining student achievement, followed by the smaller but generally positive influences of small schools and small class sizes. In the report entitled *Doing what Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching*, which was prepared for the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, Linda Darling-Hammond said:

"Teacher education matters a great deal . . . Teachers who are fully prepared and certified in both their discipline and in education are more highly rated and are more successful with students than are teachers without preparation, and those with greater training in learning, child development, teaching methods, and curriculum are found to be more effective than those with less" (10).

Today's classrooms are unique - they are populated with learners who have many gifts, talents, and interests; learners from diverse backgrounds and cultures; learners with native command of English and learners who are acquiring English as a Second Language; learners with unique learning styles; and learners from all parts of the globe who have varying previous academic experiences and preparation. These are the students of today's classrooms. As an institution of higher learning, which prepares teachers to meet the needs of all learners, we have a hefty mission to fulfill. Students need prepared teachers, and they deserve the best. They are the future of our nation. In addition to expertise in the subject area to be taught, secondary teachers, for example, need knowledge and experience in teaching methods, curriculum, learning and development, teaching strategies, uses of technology in the classroom, classroom management, human relations, and the education of students with special needs

Here we will focus on newly hired inexperienced [i. e., without previous teaching experience at the appropriate age level] provisionally licensed teachers who have completed no

professional courses. This category was eloquently represented by one TELF student who, during a class break, lamented, “If only I had known about these principles [of classroom management] and the teacher behavior continuum on my first day of teaching!” This teacher entered the classroom with an excellent background in the content area she would be teaching, so she naturally thought that the rest would take care of itself. She poignantly described her first day’s experience in a middle school classroom full of challenges. On that day, students were “angelic” while an administrator who introduced her as the new regular teacher [after a succession of substitutes] stayed to observe. After the administrator departed, however, students became increasingly unruly. Having exhausted what she thought were reasonable attempts to motivate these students academically, she tried an ultimatum. Students became more unruly. Paradoxically, her first day of teaching was also the date of back-to-school night. That evening she greeted the parents of these students, who had obviously gone home that day and voiced their disapproval of her class. She had hoped, of course, that these parent guests would focus only on the excellent program of studies she had prepared for their children. She held a master’s degree in Spanish literature, knew how to motivate students academically, and was very enthusiastic [at first] about her role in the immersion program at this school. She had previously taught adults and had felt successful as a teacher.

Reality check: does the alternative licensure route for this teacher have to be “sink or swim”? Too often the only expected answer is yes, but with proper support from teacher educators, who effectively guide the process of upgrading provisional licenses, and from mentoring arrangements among colleagues in the schools, the answer can be turned into a resounding No! Carefully planned and timely support, through on-site mentoring in the schools and university coursework, can make the critical difference for successful teaching in today’s

classrooms, such as with the individual above who was hired under a provisional license. The connection of theory, content knowledge, and practice, supported by a strong base of reflection and self-inquiry, provide essential tools for success in the first months of teaching.

The Teacher Education Licensure Fulfillment (TELF) Initiative

The Idea. In a desire to serve local school divisions who have hired teachers under provisional licensure, and with the goal of helping provisionally licensed teachers acquire the tools and knowledge they need to be successful in the classrooms of today, George Mason University's Graduate School of Education began an alternative licensure initiative in July of 1999. The idea for the Teacher Education Licensure Fulfillment Initiative (TELF) emerged from discussions with local school division representatives and from dialogues within the Graduate School of Education about effective ways to support the professional growth and preparation of new teachers, who have proven their content area expertise to the school divisions and have therefore been hired under a provisional license, but who have not completed teacher education coursework that will fulfill state requirements.

The personnel directors from the region we serve reported that there were more than 800 teachers in area classrooms without full licensure and predicted that even more additional provisionally licensed teachers would be needed before the next academic year. Because of this growing need to assist currently employed teachers in qualifying for full state licensure, as identified by the personnel directors, the Dean of the Graduate School of Education appointed two individuals as co-directors and charged them with making TELF a reality. With the cooperation and support of the State Department of Education, the Graduate School of Education

faculty and staff, and local school divisions, who all worked at light speed, TELF offerings, conceived during the summer months of 1999, became a reality during the Fall of 1999. Now in its second year, TELF is still an emergent initiative but is gaining significant strides in making itself known.

TELF was conceived as a mechanism whereby the university might reach out to newly hired teachers to work with local school divisions to provide coursework for upgrading provisional licenses to the collegiate professional level. Each TELF participant has individual requirements to be met. Some of those requirements include content-area courses, as well as professional courses; others have only professional coursework or a Praxis exam to complete successfully. Even if the State Department of Education has not completed the provisional license document listing all requirements (i. e., content-area and professional courses, as well as other experiences, such as the Praxis examination), TELF teachers can enroll in their professional courses, based on the advice of school division human resources departments and advice from university faculty/staff responsible for the TELF Initiative.

Some of the highlights of the TELF Initiative include:

- * state-approved professional studies courses that fulfill licensure requirements
- * content-specific courses that candidates might need to fulfill state requirements are offered in cooperation with other university departments
- * help with preparing for the Praxis I exam by using "Learning Plus" software. We have also worked with the local community college system to begin offering a prep course for the exam.
- * reorientation of some existing licensure courses so that the focus is on journaling/examination of successes and concerns of the week in an effort to help TELF student

use skills gained in each class session to address immediate concerns and needs

- * students are encouraged to document their own growth through the development of a Professional Development Portfolio, a performance-based document currently required of all pre-service teachers enrolled in licensure programs at our university. It is based on reflective practice and concrete evidence of teaching practice and student learning outcomes,

- * commitment of regular, full-time Graduate School of Education faculty to teach and direct TELF

- * linking TELF students with various teacher mentorship programs and other school-based support groups currently in place in school divisions

- * guidance on course choices and licensure procedures to support and coordinate with the State and the local school divisions

- * a streamlined application procedure admits students up until classes begin each semester.

TELF courses have been specifically designed--in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Education--to fulfill individual requirements of TELF teachers, while helping them to meet the challenges of individual student needs and learning styles, daily lesson planning and meaningful assessment strategies, as well as effective classroom management techniques. All these goals are performed through courses and requirements which are closely linked to the university's regular state-approved pre-service teacher education program. In fact, the first of two methods courses (for each specialization within the secondary teacher education program) includes students from both the TELF and pre-service audiences within the same class. In addition, portfolio development strategies are provided for both the TELF and regular pre-service audiences.

The number of courses provisionally licensed teachers need in our state varies according to their backgrounds, but the state may require as many as 15 semester hours of professional courses for secondary licensure, and as many as 18 for elementary licensure. We have redesigned the human development and learning theory course emphasizing special needs and diversity. In all courses, the emphasis has been on quality instruction and preparation to align with GSE goals and standards. As numbers of TELF participants increase, we will be open to more off-campus course delivery and alternatively scheduled courses. Some of our courses are offered at a local high school in lieu of on campus, which should help with parking and provide more flexibility in course delivery time. We have also offered Saturday course delivery.

We continue to dialogue with personnel from area school divisions. In an on-going partnership between the university and our schools, we have held regular meetings on campus of all area licensure personnel. We want them to tell us how we can better reach the individuals who need to take courses before their license expires. Suggestions have been made to continue to explore off-campus offerings and alternative scheduling options. Through meetings on campus, licensure specialists have also had the opportunity to network with one another and to see how fellow school divisions have been handling their challenges of recruiting and retention. These meetings have been extremely well received sessions which we plan to continue twice during each academic year.

What We Have Learned--So Far

Marketing. As anyone who has directed a program knows, there are a myriad of details associated with marketing, and TELF is no exception. At the outset, we designed flyers in electronic and hard copy versions; the electronic versions went to school divisions' intranet sites

and the hard copy flyers went to personnel offices to be included in packets received by all newly hired teachers.

We knew the audience was there for TELF and that the needs were real and growing. However, our publicity was just beginning and our initiative was new. In spite of using attention-getting (finally almost iridescent) papers for brochures, which were professionally designed beginning with Spring of 2000, enrollment growth was slow. Formerly, all students not in specific degree programs, including those seeking to upgrade provisional teaching licenses, were enrolled under the “Extended Studies” category. There had been no previous attempt to organize or sequence courses/experiences for this group or to give coordinated guidance from school divisions, the Virginia Department of Education, and the Graduate School of Education. In addition to the predictable difficulties of presenting the newly created TELF as a more visible and valuable option for its target audience, the stress factors routinely faced by first-year teachers slowed enrollment growth. Many newly hired provisionally licensed teachers view their instructional tasks as too daunting to take time for university coursework, even though they realize the provisional license is non-renewable after three years. Sadly, this understandable reluctance to begin coursework for licensure renewal all too often leads to job termination. TELF attempts to address this dilemma by streamlining admissions so that provisionally licensed teachers can begin professional coursework without delay and by re-orienting courses so that they can get feedback on their weekly successes and concerns. We have most recently targeted conversations with school division personnel and potential TELF enrollees to point out the strong support available for newly hired teachers through TELF and the school divisions’ mentorship programs in combination.

Our marketing efforts have continued and broadened. New colorful brochures have been

produced each semester. Brochures have been delivered to personnel officers as they attended meetings at the Graduate School of Education, and brochures continue to be mailed to personnel offices to be included in packets for new teachers. Although TELF information sessions have been advertized in local newspapers, the turnout has been weak. Web page access has proven to be an increasingly important vehicle for communication, and therefore, we keep information regularly updated. Mailings of brochures have gone directly to principals of secondary schools (most TELF students hold secondary provisional licenses), as well as to lead mentor teachers, due to the helpful cooperation of a school division's mentorship director. Brochures have also been delivered to school division orientation sessions and job fairs, where information about TELF has been presented to participants. We continue to stress the availability of off-campus and Saturday classes. We are now working to forge cohort agreements with specific school divisions where TELF is most needed and to find qualified adjunct faculty to help us offer appropriate courses.

Within sixteen months TELF's enrollment count is only a fraction of the potential for a fast-growing market, but we are pleased that TELF's visibility and quality are more recognized and that enrollment continues to increase. At this writing, inquiries about TELF and actual enrollment have both taken a noticeable upswing. We are thus cautiously optimistic about upward enrollment trends. Although we are not yet able to serve the numbers quoted in the potential audience, TELF enrollees report that the initiative has provided them with much needed professional guidance and essential support for their on-the-job teaching status.

Retention Concerns. Since TELF teachers do not have a guided student teaching internship semester, as pre-service teachers in our initial licensure programs do, we strongly urge students in our TELF classes to become directly involved in the mentor programs at their schools

and in other support systems for induction teachers. Virginia law now requires all school divisions to provide mentor programs for newly hired teachers. In addition, secondary schools in two local divisions participate in the Graduate School of Education's Language Minority Teacher Induction Project (LMTIP), a federally funded grant for teachers in their first three years of employment in schools with large language minority student populations. The grant supports action research teams (with a mentor for each) that function as support groups helping new teachers perform reflective practice strategies for improving their instruction. We urge provisionally licensed teachers in those schools to attend LMTIP meetings. To complement on-site mentoring programs and to support the teachers where mentoring programs are still in the establishment phase, we teach students, using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the theory of temperament types (Keirsey; Tieger and Barron-Tieger), strategies for working with mentors and the student population in their classes.

Building on these support systems, and re-orienting a TELF class to emphasize journaling about weekly successes/concerns and how to use what has been learned in class to address those concerns, we hope to avoid the "fight or flight" response of many new teachers, who decide that the challenges they have accepted are overwhelming and leave the profession within the first three years. National Center for Educational Statistics reported for 1993-94 that, of the 5.1% of teachers who left teaching, 50.2% of those left due to dissatisfaction, salary, or career change (reproduced in National Commission on Teaching for America's Future, Appendix B, Table 8). One of the primary goals of TELF is to provide provisionally licensed teachers with the tools they need to be successful in the classroom.

In the initial methods class, where the TELF and regular state-approved program audiences are combined, students begin the process of developing a professional portfolio. This

process helps to empower teachers--showing them how to present their skills and accomplishments to others in the profession, while also helping them to examine their areas of challenges. It provides a forum for teachers to present performance-based evidence of their emergent teaching practice (Fox, 1999). TELF students are also encouraged, once their licenses are upgraded and they gain experience, to consider applying for the Graduate School of Education's new Advanced Studies in Teaching and Learning (ASTL) master's degree program, which is tied to national board certification. Therefore, the TELF initiative addresses retention concerns by re-orienting classes to meet the needs of this audience, by helping students use support group arrangements in their schools, by providing a peer support group through their coursework, by guiding them in the development of a professional portfolio, and by urging them to consider completing national board certification through the ASTL master's program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by maintaining the highest standard of teacher preparation for which it has become so well known, the Graduate School of Education continues to offer, working in parallel path options, both initial licensure programs and our new TELF initiative. We must take seriously the critical importance of investment in teaching to ensure our future as a nation. As Linda Darling-Hammond asked: "Will my child's teacher be knowledgeable not only about the subjects he teaches, but about the children he teaches as well?" Our response should be "With perseverance and determination, we can take the . . . steps needed to ensure that our students have a genuine right to learn - a right made real by their opportunity to study with a caring, competent, and committed teacher" (43).

Given what we have learned from our TELF initiative adventure, and its relationship as

an alternative licensure option to our regular state-approved teacher education programs, we are convinced we can give public school students caring, competent, and committed teachers. Does the alternative licensure route have to be “sink or swim”? We are helping to change the expected answer from yes to a resounding “No!” by establishing TELF as a meaningful avenue of professional development that begins with teacher induction and continues through teacher education support networks that lead to master’s degree completion and national board certification.

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