

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 454 196

SP 040 070

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TITLE Earned and Unearned Degrees, Earned and Unearned Teaching
Certificates: Implications for Education.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Alternative Teacher Certification; Computer Uses in
Education; *Distance Education; *Educational Television;
Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Internet;
Mainstreaming; Online Courses; Preservice Teacher Education;
Special Education Teachers; Teacher Competencies; Teaching
Methods; Teaching Skills

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the impact of instructional television, directed study courses, and other alternative teacher certification methods. Colleges and universities are becoming aware of nontraditional programs that require minimal, if any, time on campus or direct contact with instructors. Soon, there will be a proliferation of Internet courses. This trend may result in: teachers who are proficient in procuring the most credit hours with the least work; teachers with significant theoretical knowledge but no interpersonal skills; and people who lack the college experience. Research shows that: in times of high competition for teaching jobs, most teachers are traditionally certified; in times of high demand for new teachers, significant numbers of new teachers are either alternatively certified, given emergency certification, or uncertified; alternatively certified teachers are less qualified than traditionally certified teachers; and better qualified teachers produce better qualified students. There is a concern that special educators are not receiving sufficient training to handle their students' special needs and that regular educators do not have the skills to teach mainstreamed students. The paper cautions that people may begin to question the skills of teachers who have taken mainly correspondence and web based courses to fulfill their degree requirements. (SM)

ED 454 196

Earned and Unearned Degrees; Earned and Unearned Teaching Certificates :

Implications for Education

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Abstract

As more and more alternative paths and programs appear that lead to the baccalaureate and teacher certification, educators and parents should be increasingly aware of these “watered down” programs, that may or may not reflect quality training and a broad general knowledge base. This article discusses the impact of instructional television, directed study courses, and the multiple alternative routes to teacher certification. The implications of these alternative routes and options regarding teacher certification are discussed.

The face of teacher preparation is increasingly changing. Pre-service teachers can increasingly avail themselves of courses offered via instructional television, web based classes and courses and directed study and independent research types of classes. These alternative courses are proliferating to the point where students are having minimal, if any, face to face contact with their instructors. While these instructional television options and packaged programs and courses may be most helpful for students in widely remote areas such as Montana and Alaska, the quality of said educational preparations is questionable.

In higher education and academia, faculty positions often require what is termed “an earned doctorate “. Colleges and universities are becoming quite aware of non-traditional programs that require minimal, if any, residence times (time on campus, if you will) statistics courses, and minimal, if any direct one to one contact with instructors. It is incongruous that universities mandate that faculty hired have an “ earned “ doctorate while promulgating the proliferation of teachers who have “ tested out “ of various courses, CLEP-ed general education requirements and sat in a classroom watching a television screen to learn about patterns of classroom interaction, management and discipline.

With the rise of alternative degree paths comes the rise of alternative tracks toward teacher certification. In some states, teachers are hired in certain fields without having completed their baccalaureate or their student teaching . These states in their desperation to hire teachers have enacted “ warm body “ laws and have put numerous teachers on waivers, allowing them to return to the university for post graduate work or to take classes toward certification. The basic law of supply and demand are increasingly prevalent and mass advertising has begin to confront tourists as they step off planes in Las Vegas, Nevada and other cities in other states.

Over the next ten years it is expected that we will see a proliferation of courses offered on the Internet, via instructional television and “ packaged courses “ wherein students purchase 10-15 tapes, a study guide, watch the tapes and test by mail or world wide web.

Never in the course of education have so many teachers been taught with so little direct one to one instruction, by so many various methods, means and methodologies. What will be the outcome of this techno-trend in education ? Some of these trends are readily apparent.

- 1) We will have teachers who are quite proficient in how to procure the greatest amount of credit hours with the least amount of work.

- 2) We will have teachers who have amassed a great deal of theoretical knowledge but be lacking in the human inter-personal skills to deal with peers, parents, and other professionals in the schools. They will have a good deal of theory, but minimal collaboration and consultative types of skills. They may have difficulty dealing with peers, para-professionals or they may use skills that were effective in previous places of work , but which may not be appropriate in a educational setting.

- 3) We will have teachers who will have mastered the art of the multiple choice test , but may not be able to construct a quality paragraph or essay. We will have teachers who have accumulated a good deal of knowledge about classroom management, but may not be able to manage a classroom and unruly students. At the current time, the authors are addressing the fact that many of the students in their classes who take a state teacher competency exam have difficulty responding to scenarios where they must interact with a hostile parent, an arrogant student, a condescending co-worker, or a oppositional, defiant subordinate.

- 4) Teachers will have acquired a college degree by simply accumulating credits . Such degrees will lack focus, integrity, and the intensity of study and comprehensiveness.

- 5) More and more individuals will have a degree sans the collegiate type of experience. After a class on the Internet , they will turn on MTV rather than discuss salient points with a professor or teaching assistant. They may or may not interact with other students and procure other points of view.

Some colleges and universities are responding to this trend in innovative ways. There are senior integrative seminars that attempt to synthesize what has been learned on the student's four, five, or six year trek toward the degree.

Some colleges are looking longer and harder at transfer credits. While some students may have accumulated many credit hours, admissions officials find many courses in art, music, physical education and other introductory classes have inflated a students grade point average as well as their bank debt.

Some colleges may need to look at the length of time that has passed since a student has taken certain classes. The first author recently did a degree plan for a student who had taken classes in the 1970's and was attempting to transfer computer classes from that time period. One thinks that things have changed in the computer world since then !

Parents who have children in school may or may not be aware of the quality or quantity of their child's teacher's college education. Parents presume that their child is in good hands. Parents presume that their son or daughter is being taught by someone with a license or teaching certificate. Parents presume that their child's teacher is engaging in professional growth and development and taking courses about learning styles and human growth and development.

There has of course, been a plethora of educational research in this area. Here are some of the recent results of educational research.

- 1) In times of high competition for teaching jobs (low demand) virtually all new teachers are certified through traditional means.
- 2) In times of high demand for new teachers, significant numbers of new teachers are either alternatively certified, given emergency certification, or are uncertified. (Darling-Hammond, 2000)
- 3) Teachers certified alternatively are less qualified than traditionally certified teachers. "The available research suggests that among students who become teachers, those enrolled in formal pre-service preparation programs are more likely to be effective than those who do not have such training (Evertson, Hawley, Zlotnick, 1985)
- 4) The typical problems of new teachers are lessened for new teachers with better preparation (Adams, Huthcinson, Martray, 1980, Glasberg, 1980, Taylor and Dale, 1971)
- 5) New teachers who received a few weeks of summer training just prior to assuming control of a classroom were rated lower than new teachers who had completed a traditional teacher preparation program (Darling-Hammond, 2000)
- 6) Better qualified teachers produce better qualified students (Fuller, 1999)

The Field of Special Education

The educational domain of special education has received increased scrutiny over the past twenty years. There have been a number of legislative decrees impacting on special education. P.L. 94 -142 has been a landmark law that has resulted in increased paperwork, accountability, benchmarks, meetings, and on going investigations. Shaughnessy (1996) has investigated the issues regarding the education of children with multiple handicaps. We are no longer educating children with handicapping conditions, but rather children have more than one handicap. Teachers are increasingly confronted with children with multiple disabilities and are increasingly unprepared to educate these children.

The training and qualifications of teachers who are working with blind, deaf, physically challenged, autistic, learning disabled and students with traumatic brain injuries is of concern. At some point in the future, some parent, is going to ascertain that

the person teaching their son/daughter is not licensed and/or certified in that area. With the current shortage of teachers, school systems are facing a serious dilemma. Teachers are needed for students with handicapping conditions that are increasingly being “mainstreamed “ or included in regular education. In most states, pre-service teachers are only required to take one three credit class to prepare them to work with a host of exceptionalities.

Instructional Television and Teacher Training Issues

Increasingly, students are availing themselves of courses via instructional television and Universities are making and offering these types of courses to recruit students and to provide schools with trained and qualified teachers. However, there has not as yet been an in depth evaluation of the quality of teachers that have received their pre-service courses via this method.

Teaching is an inter-personal endeavor. Teachers must interact with students, parents, colleagues, speech-language pathologists, guidance personnel, cafeteria workers and a host of other individuals. Yet, very little training is afforded pre-service teachers in inter-personal skills.

Teachers must interact with parents, guardians and social workers and must relate to a wide diversity of individuals from different racial, ethnic and culturally different minority groups. Again, in general, very little training is given in these areas. There may be a “sensitivity course “, but if this course is offered on instructional television, the course may be more of an “ information dissemination “ course than anything else.

Some students may procure their degree or courses, or teacher certification via the Internet. The World Wide Web has certainly revolutionized our ability to search for information and procure information. But has it brought human beings, and specifically, the instructor and the student closer together?

The advent of e-mail has certainly changed student professor interaction and communication—IF the student uses the e-mail as a method of communication. Some students will request additional information via e-mail, others may still rely on the phone or face to face probing and questioning for clarification. Other students who may not have access to an e-mail source may be at a disadvantage.

Obviously on the e-mail, the professor cannot “read” body language or hear the distress or consternation in a student’s voice. The interaction may not be a supportive one, but simply an information providing arrangement. Does the internet or the world wide web limit academic freedom ?

This question may need to be explored or examined in the future as more and more courses become available on-line. While a professor may feel free to express their opinion in a classroom where they are able to clarify, specify and provide examples, reasons and rationales for their ideas, on the internet, they may be less comfortable putting down on paper (or on e-mail) their thoughts which may require a good deal of time to clarify and substantiate.

While the learning style of some students may be congruent with the Internet, other more social students may like the personal, “ up-close ” student teacher interaction. The office discussions that some instructors have had with their students are truly memorable. These discussions may impact students, and may even influence their choice of major or minor or career . Some mentoring relationships develop between faculty and students and result in a life long collaboration. This may not be possible with the Internet. The student on Instructional television must also be aware of the following aspects of education that are particularly salient and relevant, but which cannot always be communicated via the web or net or ITV:

- 1) Classroom Climate- Students must be aware of the feelings and emotions associated with developing a classroom climate, how to “ sense “ when students are not learning or are overwhelmed or when there is tension in the class due to a death or difficulty.
- 2) Inter-personal skills are of critical importance in terms of being a professional teacher. In on site classes, students can hone and “ fine tune “ their interpersonal skills. This is not always a viable feasible option on asynchronous classes.
- 3) Role –playing scenarios with which the student will be confronted is an important integral part of most teacher training programs. This may not be able to be done via the web or ITV.

Let the Buyer Beware- But Does the Buyer Have the Sophistication to Know What is Good for Him/Her?

Students are increasingly being targeted for bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees. They in effect, are the consumers of programs on the internet. However, how sophisticated are these consumers, and how well are they able to determine the degree that would best meet their needs in the least amount of time with the greatest degree of flexibility. The authors selected two universities at random to analyze their advertisements and offerings. Liberty University (www.liberty.edu) indicates that students can “complete their college degree without entering a classroom”

However, on closer examination, this is a “military school “, but they do offer an 800 number (1888-842-9625) to respond to questions.

Southern Christian University is “ your # 1 online source for accredited degrees- in human development, management communication, liberal studies, ministry and bible.” What specific skills are offered in these courses is not known.

There is a difference between information procuring, and skill development. Nursing classes, for example, rely heavily on a competence based model. Students have to demonstrate that they can insert an IV, and that they can perform routine functions correctly. Multiple choice tests cannot determine whether a nurse can actually take blood pressure, temperature or perform routine functions. Such things must be observed.

Southworth (2000) has investigated the growing need for teachers and has offered the following questions for school systems to self-evaluate in terms of their need for teachers:

- 1) Is the level of pay commensurate with the amount of education teachers have, and does it include cost- of –living increase and rewards for student performance ?
- 2) Is the school district in an area where it is safe and attractive to live ? Can most teachers afford to live there ?
- 3) Are parents involved on a daily basis with the education process and it’s working?
- 4) Are new teachers partnered with experienced master teachers? Are they assisted with daily work and encouraged to pursue courses in professional development
- 5) Are the teachers valued by the community ?
- 6) Are administrators willing to give teachers a voice and some control over school policies and practices? (p. 26)

Southworth (2000) makes an extremely salient point. He states that “there are 6 million certified teachers in the U.S. who have left the profession. He indicates that 30 to 50 percent of new teachers leave after five years.” (p. 27). This bears investigation.

Mainstreaming, Inclusion and the Abandonment of Teaching

One somewhat unexamined factor regarding why teachers seem to be leaving the field in droves may be the recent emphasis on mainstreaming and inclusion. Increasingly, teachers are being asked to work with children with handicaps and in many instances children with multiple handicaps (Shaughnessy, 1996) . Teachers, in general, do not feel that they have the skills, knowledge and abilities to teach students who are medically fragile, who need extensive assistance, and who require almost one to one supervision on a daily basis. Teachers are not able or often willing to deal with the gargantuan amount of paper work that is required in terms of goals and objectives and documentation.

Summary and Conclusions

Correspondence courses, internet courses and degrees, directed studies, and web based courses are all part and parcel of the current educational marketplace. However, it will not be long before some attorneys are questioning the skills of individuals who have taken a vast number of correspondence and web based classes to fulfill their degree.

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