A Critical Reflection of the CSU Fullerton Alternative Certification Program

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In the past decade the demand for highly qualified and especially trained teachers of students with special needs has exceeded the supply. To meet this deficit, alternative programs have sprouted up across the country. One such program, at CSU Fullerton, is successfully trying to fill that gap. Some 280 students have completed the requirements of a specially designed Intern program of coursework, practicum, advanced seminars, research and directed student teaching and are working in the communities of four, Southern California's local counties. The following article explains and describes the process, procedures, methods and results of these efforts. A highlight of this program is action research; the gathering of data, using scientifically-based interventions and analyzing the outcomes that produce change or progress.

Alternative certification programs have been documented in forty-six states and the District of Columbia (Feistritzer & Chester, 2003). Over 250 universities around the country provide some type of alternative teacher preparation program (Basinger, 2000). Alternative routes exist for a variety of reasons (see Feistritzer & Chester); most of the programs began as a quest to support a severe and increasing shortage of qualified personnel (Dill, 1994; Rosenberg & Rock, 1994; Smith-Davis & Billingsley, 1993). Shepherd & Brown (2003) discuss what the literature says about teacher shortages and concludes that alternative certification programs are extremely necessary. Haberman (1999) highlights the need for alternative routes in urban areas of the country.

A variety of special education intern program options are available in California. As Turley and Nakai (2000) note, in California alternative certification programs have emerged in special education to lessen the historical shortage (see Gunderson & Karge, 1992; McKibben & Schrup, 1995). Karge et. al. (2004) summarized over twenty programs in a Special Education Intern Monograph.

Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975, with requirements by the Federal Government for full implementation in 1978.

This implementation brought a need for teachers to work with students with special needs. In California, there was a shortage of fully credentialed special education teachers and legislation was introduced to authorize the "Intern Program", California's version of Alternative Certification. In 1983, legislation was passed to allow school districts or a consortium of districts to develop Intern programs for teacher preparation (McKibbin, 2002). The California Special Education Intern program was for teachers with general education credentials who were interested in working with students with special needs. The two year program provided on-the-job training and support and quickly became an acceptable option for teacher preparation.

In 1997, the California credential structure for obtaining certification for special education was redesigned by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). CCTC is the governing body responsible for teacher certification in the state. University programs across the state were required to write new program documents. California State University Fullerton (CSU Fullerton) Department of Special Education faculty met with district and community focus groups including the advice of the certified district bargaining representatives during the 1997-98 school year to write a new program document to include an alternative certification method of obtaining a credential.

How flexible can a certification program be and still equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively address the specialized needs of children with disabilities from diverse cultural and language backgrounds? Research has indicated that traditionally certified teachers are better qualified than nontraditionally certified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). Though teachers from nontraditional programs may have mastered basic skills in content areas, they were unable to explain fundamental concepts to students due to lack of training in pedagogy (Rubino et al 1994; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2002). Clearly, alternative certification programs must incorporate research that has been shown to be effective in improving outcomes for children with disabilities in training opportunities and reflected in required coursework. Moreover, the course of study leading to certification must be of sufficient quantity, quality, intensity and duration to lead to improvements in teaching practice.

Aware of the controversy regarding Alternative Certification Darling-Hammond (1998) and others in the field suggest alternative certification programs bring under-qualified teachers into the classroom. Our design team set the goal of writing a first class program for teachers-in-training that aligned with the research recommendations for alternative certification and the guidelines established by the CCTC.

Program Description

CSU Fullerton's Special Education program has become a leader in alternative certification in Southern California. In a collaborative program with four County Offices of Education (Orange County, Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County and Riverside County) the Intern program provides candidates the opportunity to attain a Education Specialist credential while working as a special education teacher in one of 48 collaborating districts. The candidates in the program have the opportunity to attain

a Clear Education Specialist Credential in the areas of Mild/Moderate Disabilities, Moderate/Severe Disabilities and Early Childhood Special Education. The faculty provide a high quality instructional program, as evidenced by post-evaluations and comments made by Principals who hire the Interns (Karge & Glaeser, 2004). All of the Interns work in special education settings or public agencies (such Early Intervention Center or County Offices of Education) as inclusion itinerants, special day class teachers, resource specialist program teachers. The Interns teach in a variety of infant/toddler preschool or K-12 teaching settings.

During the two-year program, the Interns receive systematic support, guidance, and feedback from both the participating school districts, from cohort peers, and from university faculty and staff. Special program features include an emphasis on effective teaching strategies in reading, mathematics and content areas, as well as specialized training in collaboration skills for general education/special education teaming, positive behavior supports, diversity awareness, and curriculum modifications and adaptations for the inclusive classroom.

California Interns must meet prerequisite teacher preparation requirements. The California requirements include passing the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), verification of the United States constitution requirement, subject matter competency (usually passing the California Subject Examinations for Teachers [CSET]), a bachelor's degree and a program interview. In addition to traditional prerequisite requirements, Interns must meet a pre-service requirement. Before receiving the Intern credential, the Intern participates in a 60-hour practicum with typical children in general education settings and practices teaching procedures in the day-to-day classroom setting. The Intern completes coursework in classroom management, lesson planning and scope-and-sequence of instruction. The Intern creates a draft educational philosophy statement and explores the dynamics of disabilities relating to families and parents. Additionally, Interns must complete university and Intern program entrance prerequisites and experiences including activities designed to create an awareness of diversity and disability and participate in 30 hours of practicum working with children with disabilities. These requirements allow the Interns to meet the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) highly qualified definition. "No Child Let Behind requires teachers to hold at least a bachelor's degree, be licensed by the state and demonstrate competency in each of the academic areas they teach, whether by passing a rigorous state test or by completing an academic major or its equivalent" (Special Education Report, 2004, p. 2).

The CSU Fullerton Special Education Intern Program consists of three phases. The first phase, pre-service, introduces the Intern to the basic characteristics of typical child development and learning theory. All candidates in the Intern program must complete the pre-service phase and agree to attend three pre-service courses. The pre-service courses include an intensive survival training course, a families' course and a foundations course. The second phase, core-components, allows the Intern to acquire knowledge of the issues and concerns related to the statistical assessment and identification of exceptional individuals. The second phase also includes courses in the legal mandates and regulations of special education law. The third phase, advanced specialization, addresses the specific issues related to the Intern's specialty area (Mild/Moderate/Severe Disabilities or Early Childhood Special Education).

During the core-components phase, the Intern learns about the variety of effective teaching models for math/reading and other core curriculum areas and is exposed to ideas for implementation of a collaborative program. The Intern gains knowledge of the techniques and strategies for working with ethnically and culturally diverse students and is exposed to the techniques for positive behavior support. Finally, the Intern has a practicum in both general and special education.

In advanced specialization the Intern establishes specific expertise by completing characteristics and teaching methods courses relating to the specific disability area. During phase three, exploration of research and data-based instruction is expanded and advanced collaboration skills are taught. In the final semester of the program, Interns explore leadership skills and transitional, career, vocational and community aspects of special education. The Interns participate in advanced staff development, use positive behavior supports and design and implement a formal induction plan.

While in the program, Interns are allowed to take several substitute days, funded through the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Grants to Support Intern Programs to visit a Professional Development School and learn a specific strategy or assessment technique. The Professional Development School sites are award-winning schools using research based effective teaching practices to implement their programs. The chance to observe experts in action is a valuable learning opportunity, especially for persons who do not work with traditional master teachers.

Ensuring Successful Outcomes

Retention. Since 2001, CSU Fullerton has educated, placed and supported 280 Interns in Special Education teaching positions at collaborating school districts, with 276 still teaching in special education in the district of original placement. During the program, Interns are contracted with local school districts to teach Special Education while they simultaneously receive systematic support, guidance and feedback from the participating school districts, from cohort peers and from university faculty and staff.

Support. During the two-year program, the Interns receive systematic support, guidance and feedback from the participating school districts, cohort peers and university faculty and staff. The program is known for using innovative methods of providing assistance and guidance to Interns. The Interns maintain support logs and create portfolios to document progress as a teacher. The program has a fulltime telephone hotline staffed by a past Intern. Interns' messages are answered within 24 hours. Support seminars and classroom supervision and coaching are provided to all special education Interns throughout each of the four semesters of the program.

Evaluation. An important evaluation feature is the use of classroom data to measure growth of students with disabilities. During coursework, each Intern learns how to design and conduct curriculum-based assessment and behavioral assessments. Both assessments are measured at three points during the Intern's first and second years. The goal is for each child with Mild/Moderate disabilities in the Intern's class/program to show at least one years growth academically. For children with

Moderate/Severe disabilities the focus varies widely depending on their Individualized Education Programs; most emphasize behavior and social skills over academics. The level of student improvement should strongly correlate with the quality of instruction provided by the Intern, a feature in line with the Coordinated Compliance Review (CCR) regulations to assess student achievement.

The Importance of Monitoring Student Outcomes

One of the most important aspects of teacher training is to promote skills and behaviors that will enable teachers to be effective at collecting and analyzing student data in order to improve their instruction. This is no less true for teachers in special education, who must continually keep data to show that their students have progressed toward their IEP objectives. In his comments at the Swearing-In for the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, January 15, 2002, former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige reiterated that two major goals of No Child Left Behind are (a) accountability for results and (b) instruction based on scientific research. Even though teachers in the program are provided research-based tools in every course of the program, Interns must also learn to implement these instructional tools with fidelity, and to monitor their effectiveness based on student outcomes. This means that teachers must know how to choose pertinent student outcomes, select assessment devices or routines, collect data in an organized manner, analyze the results for each child in their classroom, change their practice accordingly, and to continually repeat this process. These activities are all a part of the *action research* model of inquiry which results in the training of teachers to become reflective practitioners with active control over student outcomes (Johnson, 2005).

Action research differs from traditional scientific research in that the researcher, in this case a teacher, is directly involved in the process of research and the outcomes of this research benefit the participants, both teachers and students, directly and immediately (Calhoun, 1993; Stringer, 1996). Training teachers to conduct action research should include an understanding of what Borgia and Schuler (1996) refer to as the "five C's" of action research: *commitment* to the time needed to focus on a problem, *collaboration* with peers and faculty and *concern* for their opinions and efforts, *consideration* and critical reflection of one's own practices, and acceptance of *change* as part of the practice of growing as a teacher. Thus, the intern faculty decided to train our teachers to conduct action research, and as a result, became involved in our own action research project.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

One hundred thirty eight Interns from CSU Fullerton Special Education Intern program participated in the study. The participants ranged in age from 24 to 55 with the majority of the participants (41%) between age 26 and 35. Twenty-four percent of the participants were male and 76 % were female. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (68%) with 19% Latino, 9% African-American and 3% Asian/Pacific

Islander. One percent declined to state their background. Sixty-one percent of the participants work in California Designated Hard-to-Staff schools.

Instruments

The participant's responses were analyzed in several ways. California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, College of Education conducted a statewide survey called the California Teacher Internship Survey. The questions related to why Interns chose their Intern programs for school years starting 2001 to 2005. The survey responses were analyzed with a factor analysis. This data was provided to CSU Fullerton Intern faculty. New surveys specific for CSUF were developed and administered by the CSU Fullerton Intern faculty targeting the same groups of students over the same period of time.

Procedures

Data form the California Teacher Internship Study. Dr. Elaine Chin, Professor of Education and Project Director for the California Teacher Internship Study (a Federal project) electronically distributed the California Polytechnic State University Intern survey to every Intern in the state. Her project staff conducted a factor analysis of the 8,881 participants then provided the CSU Fullerton team with an analysis of the data for statewide and a breakdown of the CSU Fullerton Intern responses in comparison to other interns in the state.

CSU Fullerton Intern Surveys. The surveys developed by the Intern faculty were distributed by mail to all of the Interns participating in the program for the previous year. They were to write in their responses to both Likert scale questions and open-ended questions. The Interns were given a self-addressed and stamped envelope in which to return their responses. The only exception to this procedure was in the 2004-2005 year where the surveys were distributed to the Interns at the final meeting of the year. The students completed the surveys and returned them to the Intern faculty before leaving the meeting. For more details on the intern survey see Karge & Glaeser, 2004.

Intern Action Research Projects. Intern action research projects were collected and evaluated over the period of time from 2001 to 2005. At the first back-to-school meeting of the 2001-2002 school year, Interns were presented with the option of participate in the action research project. Many Interns were just beginning their first teaching position, so they were told that the project would not require a lot of extra work, because they must collect data on behavior and academic progress as part of their daily teaching. To earn the stipend, they had to first choose an academic or behavioral goal they needed to focus on to improve student achievement. They had to provide an assessment of current achievement or behavior, plan an intervention, collect scores over time, and do a final analysis of the results. A short and simple overview of action research was provided, followed by a question and answer session. Before the last meeting of the school year, Interns were reminded to bring their projects to the next meeting.

For the 2002-2003 school year, a new tool was available for Interns to guide them through the action research process. This website is available through the University of Kansas (http://actionresearch.altec.org). The website provides tools for students to write their research proposals, track their progress, and receive feedback from faculty. Each project is given a number, and faculty can access the projects individually to read and provide guidance on what needs to be done to improve the project.

For the 2003-2004 school year, interns received seminars on Action Research at three meetings throughout the year. The Intern faculty emphasized that Action Research should not be a burden, and instead, should help them solve problems in their classrooms. In addition, Interns were reminded that No Child Left Behind requires that all teachers use scientifically-based interventions, so Interns should be collecting data on the effectiveness of their interventions as a natural part of the teaching process. At the first session, a model project was presented by an Intern who had completed an exceptional project the previous school year. This project was chosen because the student was able to successfully avoid litigation by using her data as evidence that students were learning in her classroom. In fact, as she stated to the group, "At the end of the meeting, the lawyer for the parents said because my data was so detailed, there was nothing he could argue against!" This Intern collected data throughout the school day on all of her students with autism and transferred the data into graphs that were easy to read and easy for parents and administrators to visualize student successes.

Another attempt to increase Intern responses to the project requirement was the addition of another website from the University of Kansas created to teach systematic data collection. CSU Fullerton was chosen as a validation site, however, constraints of the study required that only students enrolled in a collaboration class participated in the study and received the training.

In the 2004-2005 year, Interns were given the same beginning-of-the- year presentation as the previous year, but in addition, they were provided specific training in Action Research step-by-step. They were given guide sheets that were to be filled out and turned in each month for analysis and feedback from the Intern faculty. These consisted of specific steps for collecting baseline data, for analyzing the data, and for reflecting on the data to inform their teaching. At every monthly meeting, the projects were collected and feedback provided.

RESULTS

California Teacher Internship Study

To develop a clear picture of why people choose to participate in Intern programs, the California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo team did a factor analysis of the survey questions completed by CSU Fullerton Interns and compared this analysis to other Interns statewide (see Chin, 2005). Six factors emerged, however, only one factor showed a significant difference between CSU Fullerton Interns and Interns across the state. The six factors were, (1) Confidence in their ability to do the work of teaching; (2) Belief in learning by doing, (3) The desire to begin teaching immediately, often motivated by the need to earn a living; (4)

Influence from marketing or recruitment efforts (5) Internship experience may help those less sure about teaching to choose it as a career; (6) Efficiency in work towards a credential and convenience of programs. There was a significant difference (p=.05) in how CSU Fullerton Interns rated Factor One as compared to other Interns in the state. Interns participating in the program at CSU Fullerton rated Factor One, Importance of confidence in their ability to do the work of teaching as a reason for choosing to earn a credential through an Internship program, as a five "Very Important" which is the highest rating on this 5-point Likert scale. Other Interns in the study rated this item as a four or below. All other responses were consistent with other Interns in the state and did not produce significantly different results.

Additionally, the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo team did an factor analysis of the survey questions completed by CSU Fullerton Interns and compared this analysis to other Interns statewide to assess the aspect of choosing teaching as a career (see Chin, 2005). The only significant difference (p=.05) reported in which the CSU Fullerton Interns scored higher than the statewide sample was on Factor Five, Teaching gives teachers an opportunity to improve the schools in their communities or to reform education.

CSU Fullerton Intern Surveys

CSU Fullerton graduates and employers praise the program for the demonstrated blending of theory and practice. Past Interns applaud the immediate availability of classroom supports from the university both in technique and faculty time and expertise. They share that they feel fortunate to train in an environment with a high level of technology. Additionally, Interns share that being a member of a cohort provided continuous support and opportunities to participate in collegial discussions that improved their teaching. In small, job-alike groups, led by faculty in their discipline, Interns appreciate the opportunity to learn what other Interns are doing in the variety of classrooms, schools, and districts represented in the program.

CSU Fullerton Action Research Projects

First year: 2001-2002. When the projects were analyzed, only 20 of the 138 Interns completed projects. Of these, only a handful met the requirements for good action research. The Interns who met this requirement had chosen an area that needed improvement, systematically collected data and provided a good problem statement, reflection, analysis, and final reflection on the project. Others, however, did not show that they understood how to target an area, collect relevant data, and use it to change their practice. One merely turned in his end-of-the-year grade sheets. When asked why they did not participate despite the offer of a stipend, Interns reported that they were 'too busy' with school and work to spend time on a project. This was a disappointing answer, considering that we had emphasized that it was something that should be an integral part of good teaching. Possible contributors to these results may include the fact that some Interns were in their first year of studies, and until they had a formal research course, they could not apply the brief once-a-month instruction at the seminars

without more opportunity to practice. The Interns also had not been provided with feedback on their projects as they worked on them.

Second year: 2002-2003. During this year, we utilized an Action Research Website available at *www.actionresearch.altec.org*. At this site, students are provided with a template for completing an Action Research Project. It includes titles of each section of a project, and provides boxes in which students can fill-in their specific project. For example, the section for the beginning of the project is entitled *Define Research Problem and Context*. Under this heading is a box for students to define their problem and the context/setting they work in. After they fill in this section, they can submit it to the Intern advisors for editing and approval.

The website was successful in many ways. It allowed students a specific guide for their research, and a template for them to use to collect and review their data. Efforts to produce good research projects improved, but the website proved to be more restrictive than helpful for many. The template is set, and thus an Intern could not individualize a project to fit his or her needs. In addition, it was very difficult for faculty to provide feedback. Projects could not be edited, but space was provided to write comments. These were difficult for the Intern to access, and because we could not edit on the original document, many times Interns could not discern what we were referring to in our comments. Thus, the website was not used for the next school year.

Third Year: 2003-2004. A few of the students who completed the validation study and training did seem to understand how to collect and present data, and overall, the number of project submissions was better this year, but still only about a third of the Interns participated. When asked why they chose not to participate, invariably the answer was "I didn't have time." This was very frustrating to the Intern staff, as they had tried hard to emphasize that data collection should be a daily part of their teaching. The faculty discussed this over the Summer of 2004, and strategized for the Fall. One suggestion was that the word "research" may be intimidating to new Interns because they had not yet had a research class, and perhaps we should use a different term. We decided instead to keep the term Action Research, but to be very specific in what the term meant, and how each Intern was to complete his or her project.

Fourth year: 2004-2005 This step-by-step method proved to be the most successful at encouraging excellent Action Research projects. Despite the offer of a stipend, many Interns still chose not to participate. However, the quality of the projects that were submitted were significantly better. Many projects by teachers of students with moderate-severe disabilities focused on changing student behaviors, such as using the toilet, reducing tantrums, and sitting in their seats for the duration of a lesson. For teachers of students with mild-moderate disabilities, many teachers chose to focus on their standard reading or math program, and to collect data on its effectiveness. As we had emphasized this in our training, it was nice to see that teachers chose to do this topic.

One outstanding project was done by a high-school teacher in a school with very challenging students. His school is situated in the Watts area of Los Angeles, and many students had experienced life-long poverty and lack of social supports at home.

This Intern chose to teach his students to raise their hands instead of shouting out an answer. During the baseline phase, he noted that one student in particular was the 'ring-leader' of the class, so he focused his attention on this student. After weeks of instruction, this teacher successfully co-opted his class leader into the program, and as a result, the other students followed. He wrote in his final paper, "While conversing with some of my colleagues with whom I share some students, they reported a significant change in their classroom behavior. They were raising their hands outside of my class in other teacher's classes. This made me feel proud and reinforced my goal of modifying their classroom behavior." We have received permission to use this project as a model for future classes, and are considering presenting it at a state conference next year.

DISCUSSION

Two of the factors considered important in an Intern preparation program by all Interns in the State of California were significantly more important to students in the CSU Fullerton Intern program. The first factor is the importance of confidence and the ability to do the work of teaching and the second is that effective teachers are change agents, improving the schools in their community and reforming education. The CSU Fullerton Interns rate these areas as more important than Interns statewide perhaps due to the quality of their Intern program. The Intern faculty at CSU Fullerton teach and support these elements through continuing evaluation and modification of the program itself. Two major factors in our program support these findings. The first is the Action Research project that is integrated in to the Intern program and the second is the CSU Fullerton courses on collaboration and school change.

Confidence in the Work of Teaching

Results from the statewide study documented CSU Fullerton Interns have confidence in their ability to do the work of teaching. This confidence is built on the knowledge the Interns have acquired from the Intern program resulting in the ability to collect, analyze and evaluate student outcomes via the Action Research. The Action Research products and quality has improved over the years. Interns are taking the task of data collection more seriously and are reporting a higher level of confidence in knowledge of what to do with the data in order to affect change in their classrooms. The faculty have increased their focus on the projects and spent numerous hours providing step-by-step guidance through the phases of Action Research.

Teachers as Change Agents

A series of two courses cap our program, both dealing with training teachers to collaborate with faculty and families at their school sites. The first course, Collaboration and Consultation, includes training on Fullan's (1990) model of school change, on self-analysis and personality styles and how to work with others of differing styles, team problem-solving, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Two main projects required in this course are to co-teach with another teacher, preferably in general

education, and to provide staff development to the entire school faculty. To accomplish the staff development project, the special educator in training must meet with the principal and get on the agenda for a staff meeting or other time he or she prefers, to conduct a needs analysis of the staff in regards to special education, and to provide training on the topic chosen by the staff. Through this process, our teachers-in-training are told that they are change agents in their schools, and the reflections of the in-services provided by students in their final products over the years have supported this premise. The second course taken is Advanced Collaboration. This is the capstone course and students are required to turn a completed portfolio that includes strategies for advocacy, program marketing, systems change, research to support a staff development emphasis that the student has carried out for their time in the program, and student outcome data. They must include a reflection of their own effectiveness as teachers that resulted in the data (both positive and negative). Over the years, Intern students seem to have much more detailed and insightful reflections and more organized data, and in most cases, report better student growth overall.

Implications for Future Research

Interns are fortunate. They have the opportunity to teach as they learn about their profession. This gives institutions of higher education the opportunity to give assignments that require teachers to practice their methodology and to reflect on the results of their efforts, with guidance from faculty. This article covered the efforts of one Alternative Teacher Education program to evaluate it's effectiveness in preparing teachers. These results indicate that the program has been effective in promoting confidence in the work of teaching and preparing agents of change in the education community. Future research efforts will focus on Intern outcomes once they complete the program and have been teaching in the field for a number of years.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Karge has worked with Interns for the past 15 years at three different universities and has authored numerous articles on alternative certification. She and the four co-authors currently comprise the Intern faculty at CSU Fullerton.

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