

Traditional **or** Alternative—



Finding New Teachers Along Different Pathways

BY SUSAN REESE

A number of factors have made finding qualified educators a challenge. A September 2009 National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA) brief, “Alternative Certification Programs: Meeting the Demand for Effective Teachers,” noted that growing school enrollment, an increase in the number of teachers retiring or leaving the profession, and legislated class size limits are the key issues. Rebecca Garcia and Jessica Huseman note in the brief that, in order to meet this challenge, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have established alternative certification programs. Education researchers have found, however, that these programs vary widely

from state to state, and in the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education’s (NRCC/TE) 2007 publication, “Study of State Certification/Licensure Requirements for Secondary Career and Technical Education Teachers,” Chris Zirkle, Lindsey Martin, and N.L. McCaslin of The Ohio State University even reported that no two states’ requirements were exactly alike.

In 2009, the NCPA brief reported similar findings, noting that each state had its own requirements for alternative certification, and while some states and school districts have become more open to alternative certification, other states are very restrictive. To make matters even

more confusing, education researchers and other experts often argue among themselves about the evidence used to determine the quality and effectiveness of traditional versus alternative teacher certification programs. In February 2009, Mathematica Policy Research released the results of a study that found elementary school students whose teachers chose an alternate route to certification scored no differently on standardized math and reading tests from students whose teachers chose a traditional route to certification. Very quickly others responded, among them the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and Linda Darling-Hammond with the

Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, calling the study flawed because it sought out schools that hire large numbers of alternatively certified teachers from non-selective programs. Darling-Hammond noted that both alternative and traditional teachers in the hard-to-staff schools selected for the study had less training than most teachers nationally, and neither group was highly effective. So as the arguments continue, the need still remains.

Filling the Need

In her presentation at the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in May 2009, Emily Feistritzer

with the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) and the National Center for Alternative Certification noted that one-third of the approximately 150,000 new teachers hired in 2006 came through what the states identify as alternative routes to teacher certification. In 2007-2008, 62,000 individuals were issued certificates to teach through alternative routes, which is nearly double the number just five years ago.

According to Feistritzer, candidates who are licensed to teach through alternative pathways tend to have the following characteristics: They have at least a bachelor’s degree; pass a screening process; engage in on-the-job train-

ing; complete coursework or equivalent experiences in professional education studies while teaching; usually work with mentor teachers; and meet high performance standards. Feistritzer notes in her overview of alternative routes to teaching from 1985 to 2009 that the programs tended to be market driven and resulted in “tailor-made programs designed to meet specific needs for specific teachers in specific areas.”

In a 2009 NCEI survey, when asked, “Would you have become a teacher if an alternate route to certification had not been available?” 47 percent of those surveyed responded, “No.” If the NCEI statistics are even close to being accurate,

then nearly half of the large and growing number of teachers coming into teaching through alternative pathways would be lost to a profession already in need.

Preparing CTE Teachers in Washington State

The Competency Block Certificate Program at Central Washington University (CWU) is designed to help career and technical education (CTE) teachers build a strong foundation in teaching methods, classroom management, assessment, leadership and educational technology. It was

who have completed coursework from another institution, and wish to have it recognized by CWU, can submit their official transcripts and a course description or syllabus. Business or industry professionals seeking a teaching certificate in CTE complete two courses of study over the two years of the program. Competency Block 1 includes an introduction to teaching, classroom management, curriculum design and assessment, classroom safety, and application of occupational skills, knowledge and practice in a vocational setting.

teach a CTE program. “In CTE, we have some requirements that a teacher who has completed a program such as math, history or foreign languages won’t have,” notes Bowers. “Many CTE courses are offered in a laboratory setting and workplace environment, so an English teacher, for example, would not be used to working in a lab or dealing with industry safety issues. There are also different standards for CTE programs. Our CTE teachers must be able to facilitate student leadership development and work with business and industry advisory committees to ensure that their programs are meeting industry needs.”

Most of those who come to the program are already teaching with probationary credentials. According to Bowers, the district hires them to teach and then sends them to the CWU program to become fully prepared and credentialed as teachers. Their years of industry experience not only have helped them in being hired, but also count toward years of experience on the teaching pay scale. One thing that makes the program so valuable also makes it unique. “We hire district CTE administrators as our university faculty for teaching the program,” Bowers explains. “The field-based faculty are state leaders in CTE and employed by school districts to supervise their CTE programs. As district CTE directors, they are very well respected because they know what kind of teachers our schools need, and they ensure that our university program completers meet the district expectations.”

According to Bowers, more than 1,000 teachers have been certified through the program since its inception in 1994. “They have to meet the same entry requirements that other students have to meet to get into a college program,” she adds. “We have aligned our program requirements with the traditional teaching requirements, so our students demonstrate the same competencies. We did not want our CTE teachers to be considered

less prepared or inferior to other teachers.”

The people in the program clearly do not want that either, because Bowers says many of them are now asking for a graduate program option. As a result of that request, she says, “In the coming year, we will be adjusting the program to facilitate both undergraduate and graduate options.” With variable credit hours designed to fit individual certification requirement needs and 24-hour Internet access to curricula, schedules, exams and electronic messaging, the CWU Competency Block Certificate Program is providing the flexibility and the tools that can build a successful career in education. What it has achieved has not gone unnoticed. Last year this program received a CWU President’s Sphere of Distinction Award—an award that is given to innovative and resourceful approaches to academic, student and campus life giving regional, national or international prominence to CWU.

An Alternative Route in Eastern Illinois

When Eastern Illinois University (EIU) began building its alternative teacher education program in 2001, it started by surveying administrators in the state to find out what their needs were. Jim Kestner, the program’s coordinator, says, “Although we couldn’t meet them all, we were able to identify certain needs we could meet.” As a result, in 2003, the EIU College of Education and Professional Studies received approval from the Illinois State Teacher Certification Board for its alternative route to teacher certification program, and students can now become certified through the program in the areas of math, science, foreign languages, family and consumer sciences education, business education and industrial technology education.

The program begins as a Web-based course, but there is also an eight-week summer session on EIU’s campus, with



PHOTO BY ISTOCK.COM

classes generally running from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. To be admitted to the program, candidates must have a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university (with a GPA 2.65 or higher) and a major or minor in the intended area of certification. They must also have passed the Illinois Basic Skills test and the subject matter test for the areas in which they intend to become certified. In addition, they must be able to document five years of relevant work experience in their intended certification area.

“We have had quite a mix of people,” says Kestner. “Most have not been teaching but have an interest in becoming teachers, some have already been

teaching with a provisional vocational education certificate, and some have been teaching in private schools.”

The program includes an internship, and the applicants must have secured a commitment from a school district to be hired and paid as a full-time teacher for the internship. Although EIU doesn’t take a formal role in internship placements, it does assist in certain ways. For example, a mailing is sent to all Illinois superintendents and high school principals telling them about the program and letting them know they may be contacted about internships. If a district indicates that it has a need in a specific area and is looking for teachers to fill that need, EIU will work toward connecting the prospective candi-

Candidates who are licensed to teach through alternative pathways tend to have the following characteristics: They have at least a bachelor’s degree; pass a screening process; engage in on-the-job training; complete coursework or equivalent experiences in professional education studies while teaching; usually work with mentor teachers; and meet high performance standards.

also the first business and industry teacher preparation program to be approved by the Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board. According to the program’s director, Jan Bowers, “The program was established to meet the shortage of teachers and to help us get the best people to meet that shortage. People from business and industry have rich experiences that can make the learning real for students.”

Offered at four regional centers in Washington state—Kennewick, Renton, Stanwood and Wenatchee—the variable-credit program allows students to register only for the credits they need to fulfill their individual certification requirements. Those who are just beginning the program must register for the full load of 12 credits. When registering, students

The classes in Competency Block 2 are advanced teaching pedagogy, history and philosophy of vocational education, personal and student leadership development, school law and abuse-related issues, and work-based and worksite learning. The program is a 24-hour, Web-supported program, with classes meeting one Saturday a month at each of the regional centers. The nine classes held over nine months are from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and attendance is mandatory. Orientation attendance is also required for those registering in Competency Block 1 and for those who are new to the program and registering in Competency Block 2.

Some individuals who already have education degrees and a Washington state teaching certificate come to the program because they need an endorsement to



PHOTO BY ISTOCK.COM

With CTE teacher education programs striving to prepare future teachers to the highest standards, and experienced teachers serving as models of excellence, the need for teachers can be met.

dates and the district with one another.

In CTE, the program has been successful in all areas, but more applicants have come from the world of business. However, notes Kestner, “Of those who apply and meet all requirements, the ones having greater success in finding teaching positions are those with backgrounds in family and consumer sciences and industrial technology.”

There is a definite need for career tech teachers, and this need does not exist only at the secondary level. “When we have a faculty opening in our CTE program, we find it is hard to fill at the university level as well,” Kestner says. Through the EIU program, however, career tech educators can very quickly be teaching in the high school classrooms where they are needed. “From the candidates’ standpoint, our program is unique in terms of timing,” explains Kestner. “It takes about a year, but they begin in mid-May, and by mid-

August they have a certificate that allows them to teach in a classroom as a regular teacher. From the school’s perspective, candidates are beginning their careers as first-year teachers during the internship, the same as if they had been certified through a traditional program.”

Another thing that makes the program valuable, says Kestner, is that, “As a cohort program, it allows them to build long-lasting relationships. Working with other people from all walks of life who are taking the same courses becomes a really important experience. They form long-lasting friendships with teachers all over the state. They can turn to one another for support, and that network becomes a really powerful thing.”

The school administrators are also very happy to have teachers who bring real-life experience to the classroom. Kestner offers just one example of why they feel that way, and it will be familiar to

any career and technical educator. “High school students always ask, ‘When are we going to use this?’ and our candidates always have an answer,” he explains. “The schools really like that.”

Modeling Excellence

Bringing new teachers into our profession is vital, but whether they arrive through traditional or alternative routes, their first years of teaching will include both rewards and challenges. How they are able to make the most of the rewards and best meet the challenges will be important in keeping them in the classroom. New teachers may look to their more experienced colleagues as mentors and role models, and what they see may affect the quality of their teaching, according to the results of a recent study.

In “Teaching Students and Teaching Each Other: The Importance of Peer Learning for Teachers,” which was published in the October 2009 issue of *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, C. Kirabo Jackson at Cornell University and Elias Bruegmann at Cornerstone Research found that the performance of teachers is affected by the quality of their peers. Using student examination data linked to longitudinal teacher personnel data, Jackson and Bruegmann document that a teacher’s students have larger test score gains when the teacher has more effective colleagues (based on their own students’ achievement gains).

Jackson and Bruegmann also found that less experienced teachers are generally more responsive to changes in peer quality than more experienced teachers, suggesting that novice teachers should be exposed to effective experienced teachers. Their evidence of what they call the “spill-over effect” demonstrates the importance of veteran teachers modeling excellence for novice teachers.

With CTE teacher education programs striving to prepare future teachers to the highest standards, and experienced teachers serving as models of excellence, the

need for teachers can be met. And whether they are young, enthusiastic new teachers fresh from college, or career changers bringing rich real-life experiences into the classroom, the more prepared they are, the greater their chances of remaining in the profession that so greatly needs them. **T**

Further Preparation

For more information about the resources and the teacher preparation programs discussed in this article, here are some Web sites to visit. In addition to the study cited in this story, the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education has other resources on CTE teacher preparation.

www.nrccte.org

“Alternative Certification Programs: Meeting the Demand for Effective Teachers”
www.ncpa.org/pub/ba675

Mathematica Policy Research
www.mathematica-mpr.com

National Center for Alternative Certification
www.teachnow.org

“Educational Opportunity and Alternative Certification: New Evidence and New Questions” can be accessed at the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education Web site:
<http://edpolicy.stanford.edu/pages/pubs/pubs.html>

“Teaching Students and Teaching Each Other: The Importance of Peer Learning for Teachers”
http://works.bepress.com/c_kirabo_jackson/13/

Central Washington University Career/ Technical Education Teacher Preparation Program
www.cwu.edu/~fandcs/teched/index.html

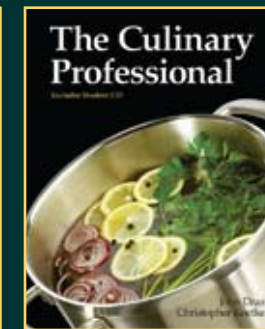
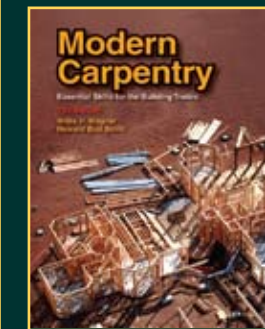
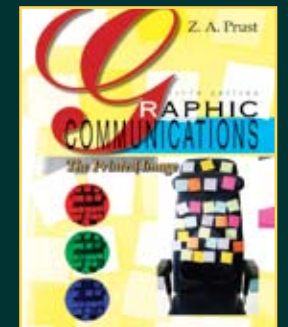
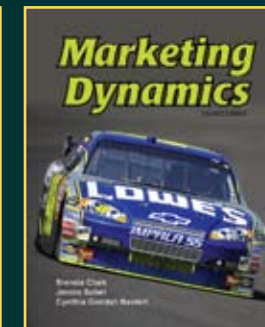
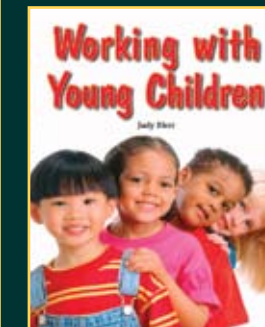
Eastern Illinois University Alternative Route to Teacher Certification
www.eiu.edu/~eiuttp/

Susan Reese

is a *Techniques* contributing writer. She can be contacted at susan@printmanagementinc.com.

Q: What Do YOU Need to Succeed in Today’s High-Tech Classroom?

A: EVERYTHING YOU NEED IS AT GOODHEART-WILCOX!



G-W products combine accurate, authoritative content with dynamic illustrations to help your students learn important career skills. G-W teaching packages provide you with an abundance of flexible solutions, including Resource CDs, Blackboard® Course Cartridges, ExamView® Assessment Suites and PowerPoint® Presentations, allowing you to focus on successful career and technical education.

In print, on CD, or online, G-W products give YOU the tools to succeed in today’s high-tech classroom!



Goodheart-Willcox Publisher
800.323-0440 • www.g-w.com